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**Acts of Holding:  
Dance, Time and Loss**

**Anna Macdonald**

# **Acts of Holding: Dance, Time and Loss**

**Anna Macdonald**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of the Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work (Route 1)

Department of Contemporary Arts

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## **Acts of Holding: Dance, Time and Loss**

### **Abstract**

*Acts of Holding* is a PhD by publication, which explores the relationship between dance, time and affect, focusing on the temporality of loss. It is a portfolio submission consisting of a body of choreographic practice, working within the field of western contemporary dance, that explores the capacity for dance to generate the temporal affect of loss for the viewer. The practice, made between 2010 and 2017, includes five screendance and one site-specific work and is submitted alongside five articles that articulate and respond to the practice-based findings. Collectively the publications generate insight into the role that loss plays in the temporal affect of dance, and what dance reveals about the temporality of loss.

By ‘temporality of loss’ the research refers to the experience or anticipation of the death of another in terms of its effect on the phenomenological sense of lived-time in the one who remains. Drawing on the author’s embodied personal experience of bereavement, the research operates in reflective loops that shift between insider and outsider positions, in ways that resonate with an ethnographic model of the participant observer. These iterative cycles of making and reflection incorporate and impact psychoanalytic, philosophical and somatic discourse, concerning dance, time and loss. From this multi-modal research, responsivity, holding and precarity emerge as three key temporal qualities intrinsic to both dance and grief. These findings add to discursive and choreographic research, into the relationship between the body, affect and time, within screendance and dance studies from writers such as Phelan (1997, 2004), Lepecki (2012), Rosenberg (2012), and Bench (2016).

**Keywords:** *dance; screendance; transience; precarity; loss; responsivity*

## Publications

*Things that start slowly* (Moving image 2010: 9m 36)

*Snow film* (Moving image 2011: 4m 25)

Macdonald, A. (2013) 'Things that start slowly.' *Body, Space, & Technology Journal*, 11(2) pp. 1-14. [Online]  
<http://doi.org/10.16995/bst.66>

*I will not hope* (Moving image 2013: 5m 26)

Macdonald, A. (2013) 'Editing I Will Not Hope.' *Choreographic Practices Journal*, 4(2) pp. 189-203.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.4.2.189\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.4.2.189_1)

*This is for you* (Site-specific performance 2010- ongoing)

Macdonald, A. (2017) 'Touch, containment and consolation in This is For You.' *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, 9(2) pp. 255-268.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.255\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.255_1)

*Falling for everything* (Moving image 2014: 5m 15)

Macdonald, A. (2016) 'Holding and Curation.' *Repertório: Teatro & Dança*, 27 pp. 49-58.  
<https://portalseer.ufba.br/index.php/revteatro/article/view/20611/13297>

*Walk* (Moving image 2016: 1m 57)

Macdonald, A. (2017) 'Going Nowhere: Screendance and the Time of Dying.' *International Journal of Screendance*, 8 pp. 11-28. [Online]  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/ijsd.v8i0.5350>

To Navy, Molly and Ivor

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## Introduction: An act of holding

The research, titled *Acts of Holding: Dance, Time and Loss*, investigates the relationship between dance, time and affect, focusing on the temporality of loss.<sup>1</sup> It interweaves artistic, personal and theoretical discourse in order to generate new insights, primarily within the field of dance studies, concerning the role that loss plays in the temporal affect of dance. Temporal affect is used (after Fraleigh, 1987; Hansen, 2004; Reynolds, 2012) to refer to a felt quality of time, a sense of duration as experienced, in phenomenological terms, within the lived-body. As such, the term 'temporality of loss' refers here to the experience or anticipation of the death of another in terms of its effect on the phenomenological sense of lived-time in the one who remains. The overall aim of *Acts of Holding* is to reveal something of what the temporality of dance tells us about loss and what the temporality of loss reveals about dance.

*Acts of Holding* is a PhD by publication. This means that the majority of the research exists as publications, already located within the public domain, which are submitted alongside a retrospective analytical commentary. The publications in *Acts of Holding*, links to which are found in Appendices 1-5, consist of a body of practice-based research, and complementary critical writing, which were developed within an intertwined process that spanned seven years. The publications (a term used here to describe both practice and writing) explore the ability of dance to generate embodied temporal qualities for the viewer that resonate with those created by loss. This choreographic research is informed by, and in turn informs, phenomenological and psychoanalytic discourse located within somatic, screendance and film studies, concerning the relationship the body has with time, and absence. The context and findings of the practice-based research are articulated within written articles that draw out the different discourses at play. The aim of these articles is not to explain the artworks but rather to critically reflect upon the way they generate affect and most were written several years after the practice. Because

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the research is referred to as *Acts of Holding* from this point.

some of the writing only focuses on particular aspects of the artworks, it is recommended that readers watch the artworks first and then read the articles.<sup>2</sup>

In his work concerning the phenomenology of loss, Todd DuBose, divides loss into three events: bereavement as a state caused by the death of another, grief, as the emotional response to bereavement, and mourning as the process of incorporating the previous two events (1997:368). *Acts of Holding* concerns all three of these states and began in 2006 after I became pregnant with, and later lost, my first baby. The abrupt disruption of the expected temporal progression of pregnancy radically altered my awareness of time. The second experience of loss came with the death of my mother in 2015, which, unlike the first bereavement, was expected and slow but created an equally distinct sense of temporality within me. *Acts of Holding* emerged from a desire to articulate two main observations of these times, which are introduced in further detail in Chapter 1. The first is that loss, in severing links between time and progression, creates a sense of a temporal moving stillness for the bereaved, where time moves but not *to* anywhere. The second is that death generates an intensified sense of the presence of oneself, and others, in time. The choreographic research includes five screen-based and one live site-specific dance work, which analyse and embody facets of these temporal qualities connected to loss. In retrospect, looking at these artworks collectively now, they also operate as a form of lament, which joins a long tradition of dance and mourning.<sup>3</sup>

The artworks originally emerged individually as part of my professional practice (a context for which is offered in Chapter 1), which operates between

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to imply that the artworks need to be viewed without a critical framework because all the works were originally screened with programme notes offering clear accounts of their research enquiry.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'tradition' is used in the broadest sense here. I am thinking of the particular role that, what Michel Briand refers to as, 'gestures of grieving and mourning' (2013:73) play in our understanding and expression of bereavement. I am also thinking of how one might move (rock back and forth, walk or dance) perhaps, as a comfort for grief, as well as the important role that dance plays in 'mourning rituals' (Akunna 2015:45) within different cultures. Finally I am referring to those dances about death and mourning that form key parts of the history of contemporary dance practice, such as, Mary Wigman's *Totentanz* (1917), Martha Graham's *Lamentation* (1930) and Bill T. Jones's *Still/Here* (1994).

live arts, dance, screendance and moving image practice. Because the practice-based research does not fit easily into each distinct category, they are referred to in this commentary as ‘artworks’.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the artworks create a dialogue between a sense of transience, potentially generated by seeing the body moving in time, and film as a form of temporal capture. This temporal dialogue within the artworks, as discussed in Chapter 1, provides a rich and nuanced medium for researching issues of presence and absence.<sup>5</sup> These practice-based methods are used both to examine and disseminate an embodied understanding of the temporal affect of loss within the viewer. In this sense, the artworks in *Acts of Holding*, operate both as analytic research methods, practically examining a felt sense of loss, and forms of embodied knowledge. The notion of embodied knowledge is addressed further in Chapter 2, but put briefly, it is with reference to phenomenologically-informed somatic discourse (Fraleigh, 1987, 2004; Parviainen, 2002, 2017) that the research offers the embodied temporalities generated by the artworks ‘as sources of knowledge’ (Parviainen, 2017:478).

The term affect is used in the research to describe the felt sense of time in the body generated by the practice. It is understood, as discussed in Chapter 1, with reference to dance writer Dee Reynolds (2012), as an embodied kinaesthetic sensation that either eludes or pre-emptly emotional or narrative meaning. Whilst acknowledging the complex inter-relationship between emotional effect and embodied affect, which is looked at in Chapter 2, the aim of the artworks is to use the kinaesthetic effect of the moving body to evoke an affective sense of duration, connected to loss, in the viewer. The ability of the artworks to generate affect is predominantly evaluated by myself, acting as the primary

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<sup>4</sup> This term also alludes to the fact that the practice is exhibited as frequently in gallery and film festivals as it is in screendance or dance events.

<sup>5</sup> I often use the term ‘films’ to refer to the screen-based publications, despite the fact that they are made on digital video and are shown in screendance or moving image contexts. This is because, the singular relationship of the work to time, which is explored in Chapters 1 and 3, resonates more with analogue film than video. As such, whilst acknowledging the effect of the medium of video on the nature and content of the final work, the research draws heavily on recent film theory.

viewer in the research.<sup>6</sup> In this sense the research draws on what Robin Nelson would refer to as my 'insider knowledge' (2013:37) of both choreographic practice and bereavement. My background in somatic practice, grounded in Alexander Technique, Authentic Movement practice and twenty years of making dance, has led to the development of an expert sense of the capacity of movement, and movement imagery, to generate affect.<sup>7</sup> This insider perspective, which forms a key tenant of much practice-based research discourse (Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Nelson, 2013) is echoed in the use of my personal experience of bereavement within the research methodology. The particular challenges and opportunities of this insider knowledge are examined within Chapter 2 where they are located, in retrospect, within the model of the artist as participant observer originating from ethnographic discourse.

The findings of this research consist of nuanced and embodied understandings of both the movement and stillness of time and a heightened sense of transience, connected to the temporality of loss. These are offered alongside a detailed analysis of the choreographic methods used to generate these embodied affects. Chapter 3 explores the way these practice-based findings add to and refine understandings of the relationship between dance and transience, making a particular challenge to binary understandings of liveness within screendance. Chapter 3 also discusses the proposition, made with reference to the psychoanalytic notion of containment (Winnicott, 1965), that a significant part of dance's effect concerns its capacity to provoke and contain a sense of contingency (a temporal quality connected to loss). Chapter 4, in its summation of the research, articulates the possibility that this contained contingency,

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<sup>6</sup> Although I do draw on my experience as a dancer in 'Touch, containment and consolation in This is for you' (App. 3), the majority of the research focuses on the affect of the artworks on myself as a viewer rather than as the dancer. This is because I am predominantly a choreographer rather than a dancer and I am more interested in the effect of the final work rather than the experience of being in it.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Technique, developed by Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955), is a somatic practice that focuses on the inhibition of habitual movement patterns (Nettl-Fiol & Vanier, 2011). Authentic Movement was initiated by Mary Starks Whitehouse and developed by practitioners such as Janet Adler (1987, 2002). It is an improvisatory process, normally involving a mover and witness, that focuses on bringing the unconscious into movement.

within dance, allows the viewer to feel safe enough to contemplate their own mortality.

What this analytical commentary provides is a descriptive analysis, and evaluation, of where *Acts of Holding* started, the methodological approach the publications employed and some of the key findings generated. It articulates the overarching artistic and theoretical context in which the individual publications operate, and points to where particular understandings of the relationship between dance and loss emerged. However, this commentary does not trace a sequential journey of the research because, as I discuss in Chapter 1, the publications were developed individually over a long period of time (2010-2017), rather than as part of a singular, linear project. Neither does it re-state the particular findings of each publication, for these are already available to the reader. Instead what this writing offers, is an act of holding that brings the publications together in one place, not to create an overarching narrative but to propose new insights and possible future lines of research.<sup>8</sup>

Although this commentary brings the publications together, as a collective body of work, it does not aim to bring their findings into a singular, present-centered time frame. There are distinct shifts in temporal register within the writing, which reflect the simultaneous acts of re-finding, re-stating and re-imagining required to conduct a retrospective analysis of existing research. For example, Chapter 2 looks back, identifying methodological patterns within the publications, whereas Chapter 3 proposes potential findings to emerge from the research not fully located within the original publications. These temporal shifts within the writing, which are explored further in Chapter 2, are intended to honour, what I consider to be, the productive tensions that exist between the '*in situ* utterances' (Skains, 2018:87) of the original publications, what I say now, looking back, and what might emerge in the future.

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<sup>8</sup> This term 'holding' is used here with reference to the psychoanalytic notion of containment (Winnicott, 1965, Ettinger, 1996), explored in Chapter 3, where a holding space is generated within which the contents can remain un-integrated.

## Chapter 1: Thinking through the body

This chapter introduces the personal, choreographic and theoretical discourses used in *Acts of Holding*, demonstrating their relevance as methods for analysing and disseminating an embodied understanding of time after loss. It begins by describing the phenomenological sense of time connected to death that initiated the research before describing the key temporal theories, and choreographic methods, employed to examine them. As part of this discussion the reader is pointed towards the understanding of affect used in this research, which is based on Reynolds's (2012) articulation of the connection between kinaesthetic empathy and embodied affect.

### Time after loss

'It's late. And it always will be late.' (Riley, stanza V., line 4)

This is a line from a poem titled *A Part Song* (2016) by Denise Riley, which was one of many artists' responses to bereavement that I read after my own experience of loss, such as Joan Didion's *A Year of Magical Thinking* (2005) and Marion Coutts's *The Iceberg: A Memoir* (2015), all of which make reference to the particular intensity of the lived-time leading up to and after loss. If Riley had written 'I am late' rather than 'It's late', it would imply a particular point in time that is now past. It would suggest a sense of clock time that had been previously agreed and then missed. In his tracing of the history of philosophical conceptions of time, Russell West-Pavlov states that the idea of a metric, measurable time is drawn from a Newtonian notion of Absolute time (2013:3). In Newton's science-based model, time is homogenous and unchanging, allowing for the accurate measurement of those activities taking place within it. In Absolute time one is either late or not late, for here time is transcendent, operating beyond the immediate experience of it. One's lived sense of time is immaterial here, for in Absolute time, time is a container 'unaffected by that which it contains' (West-Pavlov, 2013:37). However, the phrase 'It's late' is not

concerned with metric time for one can be just as late or not late at any time of the day or night. 'It's late' is an observation about a particular quality of time, it encloses the idea of 'to me it feels late'. It is subjective, implying a sense of tiredness perhaps or a particular quality of light. 'It's late' is a relative statement that talks to a relative quality of time.

Within western philosophy, a sense of time as a lived experience is central to the phenomenological work of Heidegger (1927), Sartre (1943), and Merleau-Ponty (1945) who, after Husserl (1913), propose time as a subjective and sensate experience, rather than a quantifiable and objective constant (Fraleigh, 1987). It is my lived experience of loss, which acts as the anchor point in *Acts of Holding* and, as such, it is this sense of a lived quality of time, as articulated within phenomenologically-informed dance discourse (Fraleigh, 1987, 2004; Parviainen, 2002, 2017), that the publications in *Acts of Holding* refer to. For example, the artworks respond to heightened experiences of time, before, after or during personal events connected to bereavement. *Things that start slowly* (2010) (App. 1), focuses on a quality of moving time that does not progress to anywhere, that I located within the state of hyper vigilance experienced after the loss of my first baby. *Snow film* (2011) (App. 1) was made on a day full of potential, just before I knew whether or not I was pregnant again and offers a heightened liminal moment of time before the movement of a new narrative emerges. *Walk* (2016) (App. 5) focuses on the weeks before my mother's death, which I describe as a kind of temporal plateau where it felt like time was both moving and still. *Falling for everything* (2014) (App. 4) documents something of the intensified present experienced by someone who does not know how long they have to live. *I will not hope* (2013) (App. 2) was made when my children were very young and I used to check each night that they were breathing. It explores the constant oscillation, within a state of hope, between past events, present conditions and future possibilities. *This is for you* (2010-ongoing) (App. 3) explores ways of evoking and containing a sense of loss in others. It is a site-specific work that focuses on intensifying the viewer's sense of the contingent moment of performance, whilst investigating ways of holding their experience.



Making the works, described above, was the method employed in *Acts of Holding* to generate a refined understanding of the temporality of loss, drawing on my own experience. Although qualities of time are often described in terms of emotional states, such as being boring or intense, the artworks do not focus on representing the narrative detail of these events or their emotional impact. Instead, they analyse and perform a felt sense of the movement and stillness of time within temporal qualities that emerged from them. One of the findings to emerge from this research, as can be seen from their brief descriptions above, is an understanding of the time after loss as a form of moving stillness.

‘It’s late. And it always will be late.’ (ibid)

This line from Denise Riley’s poem was written after the death of her son. It speaks of the time of grief as something both moving and still, a time that is perpetually just arrived at. It is ‘now’ and time is moving but it will also always be ‘now’ because time has stopped. When I read this, several years into this research, I recognised this sense of moving stillness within my own temporal experiences of grief, and the artworks I had already created.<sup>9</sup> In particular, I recall experiencing a heightened awareness of the transient nature of both the people and objects around me – a sense that things were constantly moving. At the same time, I felt as if all movement had stopped because I could no longer rely on a sense of predictability and futurity created by the causal narratives of time that pre-existed my loss. The moving stillness of my grief felt precarious, which is an image, as explored in Chapter 3, that runs through *Acts of Holding*. Put simply, if everything was constantly changing, and ‘this’ no longer led to ‘that’, then what could I rely on?

The question of what can be relied on beyond the present moment is a metaphysical one, which forms the basis of what philosopher Daniel W. Smith identifies as two key trajectories of contemporary philosophy: that of

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<sup>9</sup> Riley’s 2012 book *Time Lived, Without Its Flow* offers a profound and forensic description of this felt sense of time after bereavement.

transcendence and immanence (Smith, 2007:123). In his book *Temporalities* (2013), West-Pavlov characterizes these relative positions from an epistemological perspective, as one of stability versus change (2013:30), and Boccardi focuses on the formal properties of these temporal states, in his introduction to the philosophy of time, where he describes them in terms of being either static or moving (Boccardi, 2016:7). The research in *Acts of Holding* operates within the broad and complex trajectories of philosophical time, outlined above, which run through the phenomenological and psychoanalytic discourses concerning time, embedded within film, screendance and somatic literature.<sup>10</sup> However, the aim is not to add, critique or provide a comprehensive account of these temporal discourses, because the question driving the research is not whether existence is, or is not, transcendent and still (or immanent and moving) but rather *how* these distinctions might inform an understanding of the sense of movement and stillness within the temporal experience of loss and dance.

The philosopher Henri Bergson's (1911) distinction between time conceived as a series of spatialized, immobile instants (stillness) and time as an undifferentiated flow (movement) has been particularly useful in this research. It supports the practice-based research into generating a sense of movement, or a cessation of movement, within the body and the apparatus of film, by creating a bridge between temporal concepts, aesthetics and affect.<sup>11</sup> In the publications Bergson's work is used via authors, such as, Kappenberg and Brannigan to analyse tensions within the temporal relationship of the body to film. It also emerges within the film discourse of Deleuze (1983, 1985), which informs,

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<sup>10</sup> Some examples of such literature that are particularly significant within *Acts of Holding* include: Sondra Fraleigh's *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (1987), Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006), Erin Brannigan's *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (2011), and Mary Anne Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (2002).

<sup>11</sup> Writing in the late twentieth century, Bergson was reacting to the idea of Absolute time where events could be measured using time as a homogenous spatialised backdrop, and famously used the example of the cinematograph to illustrate this spatial sense of time as a series of immobile instants causally reanimated to create the 'illusion of time' (May and Thrift, 2011:22).

what film writer Justin Remes (2015) refers to as, the field of movement and stillness studies.<sup>12</sup> This discourse is populated by writers, such as Lomax, Mulvey, Doane, and Mroz, who I refer to in the publications, particularly *Walk* and 'Going Nowhere: Screendance and the Time of Dying'<sup>13</sup> (both App. 5), in terms of the way they complicate distinctions between movement and stillness within moving image practice. Chapter 3 returns to Bergson's work, where it informs an examination of the relationship of dance to, what I refer to as (after Johnson, 2003), either transience-as-end or transience-as-change.

### **Starting from the body**

The temporality of loss is examined within philosophical accounts of the time of dying and *Acts of Holding* draws particularly upon: Gary Peters's article entitled 'Time to Die: The Temporality of Death and the Philosophy of Singularity' (2004), Anna Mendes's reflection of the quality of time in palliative care (2014), and Todd DuBose's (1997) phenomenological reflection upon loss. However, these writers do not focus upon an embodied experience of the time leading up to and after bereavement and so have the potential to miss those aspects of loss that, as Phelan argues, exceed the possibilities of representation (Phelan, 1997:5). In this respect the embodied nature of the research method in *Acts of Holding* is important because grief, like dance, brings attention to the presence and absence of the body in time. As Talbot writes, grief is, 'a curiously somatic experience [during which] the body can register sorrow as sensitively and as involuntarily as a seismograph' (2001:62). My grief created a sense of stillness in my body. I felt as if I was no longer in time even though I was aware that for others time was still moving. It was as if the world was now covered in snow – it was the same world but the sound was dampened, the detail of shapes obscured and my movements within it harder and slower. Although the philosophical discourse referred to above, and the poetic writing of Riley, Dideon and Coutts,

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<sup>12</sup> The field of movement and stillness studies focuses on the way temporality is constructed within and across photography and film. It is a noticeable omission that, with the exception of books like Laura Marks's *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2000), the work of screendance is not well recognized within this discourse.

<sup>13</sup> Referred to after this point as 'Going Nowhere'.

provides compelling and sensuous accounts of the temporality of loss, what this practice-based research offers, as I go on to discuss next, is an embodied research method that generates embodied knowledge concerning the temporality of loss in the viewer.<sup>14</sup>

Dance is well placed to analyse and generate temporal affect because it is, as Fraleigh writes, 'the embodied art, of life and our living of time' (1987:181). Along with other somatic-based writers such as, Sheets-Johnston (1966), Parviainen (1998) and Kozel (2007), Fraleigh argues that because dance emerges within time, it invites a phenomenological awareness of time, in both dancer and viewer. For example, to take the image of interlinked hands unfolding from curled fists to extended fingers in *Things that start slowly* (App. 1), a significant part of the effect of this action comes from its durational quality, for it is impossible to unfold something all at once, one can only unfold through time.<sup>15</sup> Dance offers a particularly rich method for examining the distinctive temporality of loss, because the question of what can be relied on beyond the present moment can be seen as central to an art form whose 'only life', as it is often argued, 'is in the present' (Parviainen, 1998:172). Drawing on Peggy Phelan's (1997, 2004) influential and contested notion of dance as a signifier of loss, *Acts of Holding* examines the premise that the particular relationship of dance to time, as an art form reliant on the indeterminate and mutable body (Parviainen, 1998), provokes an awareness of mortality in the viewer. The starting point for the research, which is explored in detail in Chapter 3, is that just as the trauma of loss creates a heightened sense of transience (Garland,

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<sup>14</sup> There is extensive literature within the field of grief studies that considers the effects of bereavement from psychoanalytic, psychological and physiological perspectives. See Christopher Hall's 'Beyond Kübler-Ross: Recent developments in our understanding of grief and bereavement' (2011) for a useful overview of grief studies developments. Although time and the body are recurring themes within this work – Caroline Garland's work (2002) on the connection between grief and assumptive patterns of time and meaning are referred to in several of the publications in *Acts of Holding*, for example - in general there is an emphasis on using these extrinsic perspectives to identify normative and therefore also complicated patterns of grief through time, as opposed to the quality of that time itself.

<sup>15</sup> Atkinson and Duffy write that dance is distinct from other arts because 'the performer's intimate relationship with the changing states of tension and release are revealed within the time of the performance' (Atkinson and Duffy, 2015:103).

2002), so the heightened sense of transience generated by dance can provoke a sense of loss for the viewer.

Although the practice-based research in *Acts of Holding* is not always recognisable as dance, the choreographic process draws extensively on somatic practice. I describe this method, after Parviainen (2002), as thinking with and through the body.<sup>16</sup> The word somatic originates from the Greek word 'soma', meaning the living body (Batson, 2009) and it invites the possibility, according to Thomas Hannah's early description of its key principles written in 1970, of a dialogue between the 'soma' as the internally perceived changing body, and the 'body' as an external, measurable object of study (Hannah, 1970). It is this phenomenologically-informed somatic understanding of the soma – as that which can generate and reveal an internal sense of the body in time – that underpins the publications in *Acts of Holding*. One part of the research method involved paying detailed somatic attention to my felt sense of the temporality of grief, drawing on my background in Alexander Technique and Authentic Movement Practice, and reflecting on how this resonated with poetic and philosophical examinations of time after loss.<sup>17</sup> By 'felt sense' I refer in *Acts of Holding* to an awareness of my internal physical, dynamic states, alongside any emotional feelings that emerged from these, connected to my experience of time.<sup>18</sup> Another interrelated part of the method, addressed next, involves using the same somatic sensitivity to create artworks that generate affective responses in myself, and potentially others, as an act of analysis and knowledge generation.

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<sup>16</sup> Here I am echoing Parviainen's description of 'knowing in and through the body' (2002:11).

<sup>17</sup> This reflective process began almost immediately, which was partly a way of distancing myself from the experience of grief. It also continued as a retrospective act through re-enacting this embodied sense of time after loss within the artworks.

<sup>18</sup> The term 'felt sense' is often used within somatic discourse and originates from philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin's development of Merleau Ponty's phenomenological work on embodied knowing (Gendlin, 1962). There is some slippage between the terms kinaesthetic effect, a somatic 'felt sense', embodied affect and kinaesthetic empathy, in both dance and film discourse, which would bear further scrutiny. However, whilst I acknowledge the complexity of the relationship between these terms, a full examination of their relationship remains beyond the scope of this commentary.

### Real time choreography

I did not create movement to make the artworks in *Acts of Holding*, neither were they reliant on found material/footage. I did not come across events that I then filmed, I constructed situations that produced events, which I then recorded (or constructed again).<sup>19</sup> The movement-based performative events in *Acts of Holding* were predominantly generated from scores. By scores I refer to sets of instructions or tasks given to the performers, which generate movement. Most of the scores were designed to produce movement that had a sense of contingency, precarity and immediacy, perhaps because it was hard to achieve or was subject to changing conditions. The effect of these scores is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 but in brief, one example, used in the making of *I will not hope* (App. 2), involved inviting people to come and catch leaves falling from trees in autumn. The dance emerged from the participants' need to look up, lean forwards, watch attentively and run to catch falling leaves.

The use of scores in *Acts of Holding* is influenced by the late 1960s post modern work of the Judson Group, formed in New York in 1962, associates of which include seminal choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and Deborah Hay. This experimental dance, developed in tandem with performative fine art practices such as Alan Kaprow's *Happenings*, often involved task-based scores that focused on the durational real-time quality of movement it produced.<sup>20</sup> These scores also invited unpredictable outcomes and were designed to intensify the experiential affect of liveness within the event.<sup>21</sup> I position *Acts of Holding* within the contemporary lineage of this work that threads through experimental choreographic and performative practice. For example, the artworks are particularly influenced by practitioners such as Goat

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<sup>19</sup> This way of making has been a part of my practice for a long time but became clear as a method towards the end of the research.

<sup>20</sup> See Trisha Brown's *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970), Lucinda Child's *Carnation* (1964) and Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966).

<sup>21</sup> Whilst liveness in *Acts of Holding*, as I go on to explore in Chapter 3, is focused upon in terms of its relationship to loss (Phelan, 1997), liveness in the Judson work was often positioned as a form of resistance to the separation of dance and life within what they perceived as commodified, virtuosic modern dance forms (Banes, 1987).

Island, Jonathon Burrows and Jérôme Bel whose work resonates with, what dance artist and scholar Alice Chauchat describes as, 'movement practices that affirm uncertainty' (2018:2).

Most of the events in *Acts of Holding* were filmed and shown as screen-based works. These are programmed within experimental film and video festivals but their emphasis on the moving body locates them most clearly within the artistic context of screendance.<sup>22</sup> There is a clear distinction between the discourses and curatorial practices of dance and screendance, which, as noted by screendance writers such as Brannigan (2011) and Rosenberg (2012), reveals the ontological significance of liveness within them both. Brannigan argues that screendance is riddled with anxiety about the loss of the presence of the body (2011:9), its plethora of names such as videodance, dance film, dance for film etc. pointing to the necessity of its definition being almost anything other than just 'dance'. The hybrid form of screendance creates tension by placing the 'intrinsically indeterminate' (Parviainen, 2002:11) body, which changes in and through time, within a medium irrevocably bound to its time of production.<sup>23</sup> The use of scores, designed to invite precarity, work to intensify this connection between stability and change within the practice. Although these binary distinctions are challenged in the publications, as discussed in Chapter 3, this makes it a highly productive method for researching the temporality of loss within *Acts of Holding*.

A tension between presence/absence and stability/change is just as significant in *This is for you*, which exists as a site-specific dance where the score is

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<sup>22</sup> Within the various histories of screendance offered in current literature both Douglas Rosenberg and Claudia Kappenberg note its place within the lineage of fine art practice, tracing the relationship between movement and image from Muybridge to Edison to Fuller and through the radical practices of early video and performance art (Rosenberg, 2012:36).

<sup>23</sup> Although the majority of screendances screened at major festivals do involve dancing bodies, in some capacity, there are many examples of screendance that do not. Notable examples include *Birds* by David Hinton (2000) and Mariam Eqbal's *Choreography for the Scanner* (2015). A useful discussion of the way 'dancing' is conceived in relation to the body within screendance, can be found in Anna Heighway's essay 'Understanding the 'Dance' in Radical Screendance' (2014).

repeated live to different viewers. *This is for you* is described in Victoria Hunter's book *Moving Sites: Investigating Site specific dance* (2015) as an example of current participatory site-specific dance that emerges from the lineage of the Judson group and their celebration of movement as a found object within everyday spaces (Hunter, 2015:17).<sup>24</sup> According to Hunter (2015), Norman (2010), and Kloenitz and Pavlik (2011), the attention paid to the spatio-temporal location of the movement in site-specific practice, which is explored further in Chapter 3, works to emphasise the transient status of dance. In *This is for you* (App. 3) the dancer and viewer encounter each other long-distance, mediated by a window, which means they cannot hear or touch each another. Although *This is for you* does not involve the spatial and temporal separation inherent in an encounter with a filmed body, it strikes me, looking back, that both practices involve trying to connect with another person who is not there with you. Both concern an effort on my part, as both maker and viewer of the work, to remain connected with another, despite separation.

In her article 'Does Screendance need to look like dance' (2009), Kappenberg uses the term 'real-time choreography' (2009:101) to describe a combination of found and generated material in works by practitioners, such as Becky Edmunds, and contrasts this with what she refers to as 'edited time' where time is constructed through the arrangements of shots.<sup>25</sup> 'Real-time' choreography is a useful term for describing part of the choreographic method used in *Acts of Holding*. This is because the artworks employ an intrinsically body-based temporality, meaning that the temporality of the film is often generated by the movement that is in it (a limitation that is explored in Chapter 3), rather than being constructed predominantly through editing. Within the artworks time is used as a singular element of the process. The movement of the body in time, and the footage of this movement, is considered as both material and constraint.

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<sup>24</sup> There is noticeable resemblance, that I had not been consciously aware of when making it, between *This is for you* (App. 3) and Lucinda Child's *Streetdance* (1964), where the dancer points out architectural features of the street to a viewer watching them from a window.

<sup>25</sup> Becky Edmunds is an artist whose work, like my own, borders screendance and moving image practice.



I did not re-film events and in most cases, as discussed in Chapter 3, the singularity or unrepeatability of the event was built into its design.<sup>26</sup> The final artworks were generated from the resulting footage, and these moments of time placed, almost as found objects (although I generated the situation in which they emerged) in a collage form. Working in this way differentiates this work perhaps, from other screendance practices, such as Katrina McPherson and Simon Fildes's influential non-linear trajectory editing style (Pearlman, 2009:52) that excels at choreographing time, creating rhythm and flow, from the editing of existing footage.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the emphasis on the real time of the movement in the work, edits become overt devices in *Acts of Holding* that draw attention to the construction of time within the apparatus of film. Edits therefore operate as a crucial part of the research method and, like the research process as a whole, they are used in a way that intertwines embodied and discursive processes. For example, in making the hundreds of jump cuts in *I will not hope* (App. 2), I worked with a particular awareness of Laura Mulvey's (2006) writing concerning the Freudian death/life drives, embodied within the edit, working to push the narrative forwards towards the end by cutting to the next event. In *Walk* (App. 5), when I constructed the jump cut that takes the woman back to the start of the frame, I was aware of Mary Ann Doane's (2002) work on the contingency of the single shot and the role of the edit in generating narrative flow and casual order. In the examples above, discursive knowledge is combined with what I refer to in 'Editing I Will Not Hope' (App. 2) as a kinaesthetic editing process, which involved cutting using my felt sense of when the shot should end or when I desired difference.<sup>28</sup> In the editing process, alongside my conceptual concerns, I

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<sup>26</sup> To make *I will not hope* (App. 2), I used multiple static cameras to record the singular event of people catching leaves. In the article about the work I compare this process with throwing a net out to catch fish, alluding to the dual sense of potential and anxiety embedded in the act of recording (Macdonald, 2013:6).

<sup>27</sup> Kappenberg refers to this re-choreographing of time in screendance as 'release film' as the footage in these films is released from the chronology of real time (2009:100).

<sup>28</sup> This practice falls within, what is often referred to in screendance discourse as, somatic filmmaking, which, as Anna Heighway writes, 'does not mean privileging the body at the expense of thought, but rather an approach to filmmaking that initiates at the body' (2014:54).

trusted my choreographic sense, and the deep personal understanding of the temporality of loss I was examining, and would shift the edit point until it re-generated something of my experience of the temporal affect of loss within me. In this sense I am the primary viewer in *Acts of Holding* and my insider expertise, as someone who has experienced loss, is central to the decision of when affect is generated. The challenges and opportunities that are created by working in this closed loop of creation and affect are returned to in Chapter 2, after the following introduction to the understanding of affect within this research method.

### **Affect**

It was several years into this work that I was introduced to the concept of affect as championed by Massumi (1995, 2002), Hansen (2004) and others, which offered me a useful way of understanding what art writer Amelia Jones refers to as the ‘change of state’ (2012:13) I wanted my artwork to produce in the viewer. For the artworks in *Acts of Holding* were not concerned with representing the narrative of my loss but in generating, what I came to understand as, the temporal affect of grief in the viewer, as something felt, embodied and visceral. The understanding of dance’s affect in this research portfolio draws on the influential research of dance writers Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason who bring together theories of kinaesthetic empathy and affect theory in their book *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices* (2012). Here Reynolds (after Massumi) writes, that ‘[t]o be ‘affected’ is to be moved in an embodied sense, rather than in the more cognitive sense’ (2012:126). Reynolds argues that this affect is created by the viewer’s empathic kinaesthetic response to the movement of the dancer.<sup>29</sup>

The artworks in *Acts of Holding* do offer representational or symbolic images, such as, a woman wearing black in *Walk* (App. 5), for example, signifying a funeral attendee or the images of people trying to catch leaves in *I will not hope*

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<sup>29</sup> Kinesthetic empathy is the term Reynolds and Reason use, drawing on neuroscience research, to describe the process whereby we see others move and echo this movement in our own body (Reason and Reynolds, 2012).

(App. 2), which are ‘saturated with autumnal associations of [...] death and renewal’ (Macdonald, 2013b:196). These images may trigger memories and associations in the viewer but it is their ability to evoke a physical felt response that is the focus in *Acts of Holding*. In *I will not hope*, for example, hope is generated in the concrete physicality of the act of catching leaves itself, rather than residing solely in the symbolic idea of catching leaves.<sup>30</sup> When I watch the leaf catchers reach out, I feel my weight shift very slightly forward in response. This kinaesthetic response to the image makes me feel that there is not much time, or that this next moment is a very important one that must be attended to. Leaning forward creates a sense of possibility for me because I am able to move forward quickly from this position; however, like hope, it also generates the possibility of failure for it takes me off balance.<sup>31</sup> Steven Shaviro uses the model of an ‘affective map’ to illustrate how both these processes of representation and affect might operate simultaneously within film (2010:6). According to Shaviro, an affective map does not ‘just passively trace or represent, but actively construct and perform, the [...] flows and feelings that they are ostensibly ‘about’ (ibid). This construction and performance of affect generated from something they are also ‘about’ is what the practice in *Acts of Holding* works to do.

As the reference to Shaviro above indicates, in much of my practice, the dancer is encountered onscreen and so somatic affect is explored here in relation to the capacity of the apparatus of film to generate, what Mark Hansen articulates as, a shift in the viewer from ‘abstract time consciousness to embodied affectivity’ (2004:589). This involves not only the movement of the dancers, of course, but the movement created by the flow of images, the contrast and transitions between shots, the sound used in each work and the context in which the work is encountered by the viewer. Vivian Sobchack’s use of the term ‘the film’s body’

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<sup>30</sup> Whilst I acknowledge that the body reaching, waiting, listening acutely, weight shifting forwards in readiness offers pedestrian actions we associate with hope, I would argue they also embody hope.

<sup>31</sup> The connection between time and balance runs through, and is important within, *Acts of Holding* but is addressed most directly in ‘Going Nowhere’ (App. 5), as discussed in Chapter 3.

(1992:XVIII), as one embodied entity combining film and viewer, provides a useful way of thinking about the kinaesthetic effect of film on the body of the viewer.<sup>32</sup> This is returned to in the following chapter, which looks at the co-generation of knowledge between the body in the film and the body of the viewer.

In this chapter I have introduced the phenomenological sense of lived-time that initiates *Acts of Holding* and demonstrated why the practices of screendance and site-specific dance offer such nuanced and productive methods for analysing the temporality of loss. The discussion of the way the choreographic research in this portfolio generates an embodied understanding of loss, raises the complexity of working with insider/outsider perspectives in the research and it is this that the next chapter goes on to examine.

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<sup>32</sup> See also Laura Marks (2000), Sarah Friedland (2016) and Karen Wood (2015) writing, concerning kinaesthetic responses to the screen in screendance/film.

## Chapter 2: Stubborn materials

Having introduced the key choreographic, personal and academic discourses used in *Acts of Holding* in the previous chapter, the focus of this chapter is the way these methods are brought together within a multi-modal and interdisciplinary research framework, a process I refer to as working with stubborn materials. This leads to a discussion of the challenges and opportunities of working with fluid insider/outsider perspectives within the research, which draws, with reference to Kappenberg's ethnographically informed notion of the 'observational' screendance artist (2009:97), on the notion of the artist as participant observer.

Arts based research can be defined 'as the systematic use of the artistic process' to explore ideas (McNiff, 2008:29). This was not the case in *Acts of Holding*. For example, I chose the field for *Walk* (App. 5) two years ago for several reasons: because I walked down there when I was five and it was so muddy my brother could not cycle his chopper, again when I was in my teens to furtively smoke cigarettes, in my forties to take a break from caring for my mother and, latterly, when my family walked down after her death and the children released balloons in their grandmother's memory. Earlier this year I read Compagnon's discussion of Barthes' *Mourning Diaries* (2010) where he notes that the landscape of grief is often described in terms of its 'never-ending flatness' (Compagnon, 2016:212). I did not think I consciously chose this field as a metaphor for grief but I may have because there are other places just as significant but not as poetically flat and never-ending as that landscape. During my Masters degree I read about Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) notion of movement schema, those long-known patterns of movement that we carry in our body. Years later, at a conference, I heard the philosopher Alphonso Lingis talk about moving to nowhere and this resonated with my experience of having no next steps to take with my mother, because she was dying, and it helped me give words to the strange sensation of temporal moving stillness I experienced

at this time.<sup>33</sup> Later, I used my knowledge of Alexander Technique to bring my body together during the walk to the front of the church at my mother's funeral. Much later I thought about this walk in terms of movement schema again, as a form of embodied time, and I decided to re-enact this walk along the lane near my mother's house to make a film I called *Walk* (App. 5).

As the writing above suggests, although there are clear methods operating within the practice-based research that are discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, the way the practice interacts with critical theory and personal experience is neither sequential nor systematic. Discourses and practices overlap. It is hard to untangle them in retrospect. One of the problems with this is that the original specificity of an event, idea or action can be lost as it transforms within its encounter with others. Within the non-linear nature of the research journey, this can create a feeling of timelessness that gives ideas a seductive sense of truth – as if I have always known what I know now rather than being aware of particular points of change. In addition, as I write about in 'Things that start slowly' (App. 1) and 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5), there is a timelessness to the trauma of grief, which has meant that a sense of chronology was not always evident to me. In this writing, I note the way that artworks, such as, *Things that start slowly* (App. 1) generate a sense of temporal progression that offsets this. However, this rich process of entanglement and returning also allows me to theorise in and 'out of practice' (Bolt, 2006:1) in ways that are potentially precluded by more linear research processes where, for example, a singular theoretical concept is explored within a singular artwork (or vice versa).

The interrelation of different research modes in the methodology is reflected in the form of *Acts of Holding's* publications where the different discourses work like found objects within a collage. The articles shift between theoretical observations, movement analysis and detailed personal accounts of bereavement, just as the artworks move from poetic evocations of loss and the

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<sup>33</sup> Arts and Medical Humanities: *Dangerous Currents: Risk and regulation at the interface of medicine & the arts*, Dartington, 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> June, 2015.

overt use of filmic devices, such as jump cuts, that jolt the viewer into another frame. At times the relationship between the elements in the portfolio submission is jarring, throwing the viewer affectively back into their body or out (or perhaps further in, according to writers, such as, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and Cull (2011)) into philosophical thought. Sometimes, when the intermodal framework is less successful perhaps, these distinctive materials are homogenised within an overarching narrative – the complexity of an image smoothed away by a dominant, often theoretical discourse, for example.

At its best, the academic theory, artistic practice and personal experience in *Acts of Holding* exist as stubborn materials rubbing against each other, creating friction and new knowledge. The term ‘stubborn materials’, echoing the modernist tenant of ‘truth to materials’,<sup>34</sup> is used here to reflect the focus in *Acts of Holding* on revealing rather than concealing the nature of the materials; the materials being the body in time, whether that is the time of film or the time of performance. An example of this approach that was very influential in the writing of *Acts of Holding*, both in terms of its content and form, is Phelan’s article ‘Trisha Brown’s Orfeo: Two Takes on Double Endings’ (2004), which brings together the experience of the death of her lover, the choreography of Trisha Brown and psychoanalytic discourse concerning death.<sup>35</sup> Here Phelan creates a space where the temporal specificity of events and ideas is maintained as they are considered side by side, rather than acting as exemplars or explanations of one another. Phelan performs an act of holding with this writing, perhaps, rather than constructing a hierarchical narrative where one discourse is positioned as leading to another.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Famously associated with Bauhaus architecture where form is married to function.

<sup>35</sup> Phelan refers to this bringing together of personal, critical and political voices in her book *Mourning Sex* as performative writing (1997:11). Drawing on Austin’s (1962) notion of the performative utterance, this term articulates a form of writing that enacts the question of ‘how to mean in words’ (Pollock, 1998:75). A key facet of this way of writing is its challenge to the possibility of a critical separation between writer, world and meaning, or what epistemological feminist Donna Haraway describes as the view ‘from nowhere’ (1988:581).

<sup>36</sup> Although beyond the scope of this coomentary, there is an interesting connection between performative writing, as a research methodology that allows the different elements within it to remain connected without integration, and Bracha Ettinger’s (2005) maternal model of creativity, or co-poesis, which describes a co-jointed connection between self and other.

Kappenberg uses the concept of emergence, which she locates, via Nellhaus (2006), within the philosophical field of critical realism, to describe the way knowledge can be created within the intertwined relationship between theory and practice within screendance research.<sup>37</sup> According to Kappenberg, critical realism allows for multiple layers of discourses to interact and operate upon one another allowing 'classifications to be formed and reformed in an on-going dialogue between theories and practices' (2009:94). What appeals to me about this model is that within it, as Kappenberg paraphrasing Nelhaus states,

theories are emergent properties of practices, they may arise from a practice and act on it, but are not reducible to it. We can also invert this statement; that is practices are emergent properties of theories, arise from theories and act on these, but are not reducible to them. (Kappenberg, 2009:93)

Whilst acknowledging that this model maintains a binary relationship between theory and practice, which has been challenged in much practice-as-research literature, there is an attractive sense of reciprocity and respect between theory and practice in the concept of emergence.<sup>38</sup> The idea of maintaining and valuing different knowledges is essential to the intermodal methodology employed in *Acts of Holding* because it offers embodied and discursive research, into the temporality of loss, as distinct and equally significant ways of knowing. In a non-hierarchical system such as this, equal value is placed upon, what Nelson describes as the experiential 'insider-experience' that practice-based research brings to the process of generating knowledge (2013:27). It is my personal experience of loss that began the research and acts as the 'data' running through the project and it is this nearness, the fact that I am 'spatially more proximal to the object to be understood' (Nelson, 2013:20) that, according to

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<sup>37</sup> See Barrett and Bolt (2007:6) for a more general discussion (after Beckermann, 1992 and Bourdieu, 1993) of the 'emergent evolution' of knowledge from within complex systems of practice-based research.

<sup>38</sup> Although there is not room to explore it further here, a binary distinction between 'traditional objective/subjective, empirical/hermeneutic binaries' (Barrett and Bolt, 2007:4) has been challenged in much practice-as-research discourse, including Bolt (2004).



Nelson, is crucial to the quality of this kind of research. For *Acts of Holding* concerns the concrete embodied experience of the death of another and as such I am an expert viewer with a privileged insider perspective. For example, I walked to the front of the church at my mother's funeral. I then re-enacted this walk to make *Walk* (App. 5), re-finding the felt sense of this movement again as I walked in a different time and space. The re-enactment, and the filming of this re-enactment, means that I am temporally and spatially distant from the original event, but remain intimately connected with it. This insider/outsider position resonates with the ethnographic model of a participant observer, which is offered by Kappenberg (2009) as one way of articulating the perspective of, what she refers to as, the 'observational' screendance artist. The model of the participant observer offers a useful way of articulating the reflective loops of research in *Acts of Holding* that both move between, and simultaneously maintain, intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives.<sup>39</sup>

From this unique insider position, I can walk until I feel I have re-found the sensation of that original walk. In addition, as editor, and viewer, of the artwork, it is my kinaesthetic sense that is used to evaluate the temporal affect of the resulting image. It is worth noting, however, that it is the distance created from my personal experience of the temporality of loss, which in this instance was generated by the research methods, that facilitates this insider analysis. Filming myself (and others) created a space between my grief and myself, and myself as performer, editor and viewer.<sup>40</sup> In the act of recording I become my own witness, holding myself, as an act of self-care, within a frame. This distance is also temporal for there are often long gaps between the idea, the filming,

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<sup>39</sup> I did not always embrace the unique points of comparison I could have made in experiencing the multiple perspectives of dancer, editor, viewer, writer and bereaved. For example, one of the stumbling blocks in writing the article 'Touch, containment and consolation in This is for you' (App. 3) was a confusion between my perspective as dancer, choreographer and viewer. In the end I changed the article to focus on what it felt like to dance in the work rather than to watch it because I could not find a way of writing from a viewer's perspective that did not feel presumptive and overly subjective. It was much later that I realised that what was needed was to find a way of owning the value of, what I now consider to be, my insider, embodied perspective as both audience and performer.

<sup>40</sup> In 'Editing I Will Not Hope' (App. 2), for example, I note the distance I generate between myself as editor and the participants within the event, who look so joyful.

editing, showing and writing. By the time I had finished *Walk* (App. 5), for example, I referred to myself as ‘the woman’ in the film because I no longer felt like the person I was.<sup>41</sup>

### **Why write about loss rather than just make art about loss?**

In *Things that start slowly* (App. 1) I speak about things connected to my body that will fade over time. They form a long list ranging from “the taste in my mouth will be gone in fifteen seconds” to “everything I ever stepped on will be gone in five billion years” (Macdonald, 2010). The monologue is a lament but it is read like the Shipping Forecast using an uninflected, low and archetypal contemporary performance style.<sup>42</sup> In the article about the work of the same name, it is described as a voice you can trust. It expresses certainties about uncertain things and in doing so potentially echoes, or perhaps even mocks, the way the indeterminate body is sometimes spoken for within medical narratives. *Acts of Holding* begins from a sense of precarity, an anxiety provoked by the mutable transient nature of the body.<sup>43</sup> It is perhaps partly in response to that, and partly in response to the epistemological insecurity of dance, that in this writing, and in the publications in *Acts of Holding*, it was hard to resist the urge to fix (to cure and make still) the body with words.<sup>44</sup> In ‘Holding and Curation’ (App. 4) for example, I note that the act of writing about working with someone who was terminally ill, can be seen as an act of distancing myself, and conjuring up some protection from, their contingent, indeterminate body; from their illness. The whole project of *Acts of Holding* could be seen as a way of creating

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<sup>41</sup> I find it hard to watch the artworks currently because they look dated, sad and too intense and I no longer want to think about the way I felt when I made them.

<sup>42</sup> The Shipping Forecast is an iconic maritime weather report broadcast on BBC Radio, UK.

<sup>43</sup> Whilst acknowledging the ultimate reliability of death I still feel, on some level, that the death of those that I loved is an indicator of their unreliability. After all, I relied upon them and I was relying on them to remain alive.

<sup>44</sup> The term epistemological insecurity, is used to refer here to the difficulty of an embodied art form, such as dance, to meet the requirements for distance and objectivity located within traditional epistemological frameworks. Although challenged by recent developments within practice-based research, propositional epistemological models remain relatively dominant within UK Higher Education research assessment contexts, such as the Research Excellence Framework, which can promote a sense that dance has to justify its right to, as Ellis puts it, ‘sit at the big table with the knowledge producing grown ups’ (2018:484).

pattern out of contingency; an attempt to make sense of mortality in order to feel safer.

However, whilst this moment described above from *Things that start slowly* (App. 1) works to expose the anxiety of trying to capture something of embodied experience, it also refers to the comfort gained from the epistemological certainty that writing appears to offer. Earlier in the film, for example, it is suggested that after bereavement you can “place your experiences in ever-wider contexts to feel safer” (Macdonald, 2010).<sup>45</sup> In part, this process is repeated in *Acts of Holding*, which uses writing to place my personal experience within the wider context of academic theory. Seeing your experience as part of a wider pattern, as a result of moving between individual responses and common tropes drawn from external perspectives, can create what Law calls ‘precious pools of apparent order’ (Law in Thrift, 1997:131). Although I am attracted to the sense of order created by locating connections between personal, academic and artistic discourse, it must be acknowledged that such resonances can also cover the fact that they do not know in the same way. In fact according to Simon Ellis, in his article ‘That Thing Produced’ (2018), practice-as-research does not produce knowledge at all in that it actively resists the closure required for epistemological validity within academic frameworks (2018:489-490).

There is a danger that the writing in *Acts of Holding* does not always acknowledge the fact that not every aspect of the artworks, or every aspect of my experience, can be articulated in words, therefore negating the primary reason for using dance as a research method. Reflecting upon articles such as ‘Editing I Will Not Hope’ (App. 2) now, for example, I see that the theory tends to dominate the artwork – missing opportunities for the personal and artistic knowledge to impact and inform the psychoanalytic theories that sit there almost as an explanation of the practice. At times in the publications, to borrow

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<sup>45</sup> I was referring here to the process of considering my individual experience of bereavement within a medical statistical framework – perhaps to be reassured that it was something that many others have recovered from or that my loss was not down to fate, god, or my own physical failings.

Phelan's words '[t]he unworded is sentenced to meaning' (1997:17). In other parts of the research the shifts between different discourses works to resist positioning academic theory as that which transcends personal discourse. For example, in 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5) the temporal stasis I experienced towards the end of my mother's life is illuminated for me as I read it now, by its comparison with a Deleuzian (2001) sense of immanence that honours and maintains the differences between them.<sup>46</sup>

An insider perspective can be problematic because it is seductive to think that others think as you do and it is important to remember that what is widely observed as a pattern is still only a widely observed pattern. Looking back, the artworks in *Acts of Holding* are more able to resist a desire to generate generalized and summative moments of insights than the writing. The endings of the artworks do not offer conceptual points of resolve – more a marking of the end of a length of time. In the articles, however, I notice a tendency to finish in a far more Hollywood film style, often on a positive, softly lit moment of potential insight that extrapolates from very early and specific research findings to propose broader significance. Despite this tendency, the aim of *Acts of Holding* is not to use academic theory to validate or universalize my singular understanding of the temporality of loss, but rather to generate affective individual understandings of it for myself, and potentially others – as a way of making something of it shareable.

But what do I mean by making something of the work shareable? What is it that is shared and how can I know whether or not I have been successful in sharing it? Concerning the epistemic value of practice-based research, Ellis questions whether it is possible for practice to 'know' in a definitive, singular way but rather to invite reflection, responses and a desire to know in others (2018:487-8). Part of the reason the artworks in *Acts of Holding* do not aim to generate singular points of knowledge is that they focus on producing affect in others

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<sup>46</sup> The article is still too full of other people's ideas, however, and I would write it differently now with more of an emphasis on the artwork's effect.

rather than narrative understanding. The artworks in *Acts of Holding* are designed to generate an embodied temporal affect of loss in those that watch them and, drawing on Sobchack's model of the film's body (1992:XVIII), introduced in the previous chapter, I would argue that the embodied knowledge that emerges from the practice does not reside in the body of the artwork or viewer, but in both. Screendance writer Sarah Friedland takes up this point when she writes that,

[e]mbodiment need not be theorized only as a spectatorial state that allows for affects and "somatic responses" as effects, but as a condition that enables these affects to participate in and co-produce the very meaning of the texts conceptualized as producing those effects (Friedland, 2016:51).

Here Friedland alludes to the co-generation of knowledge between the artwork and viewer within the processes of kinaesthetic intention and affect. Reynolds describes this process of generating embodied knowledge within the reflective process of watching dance as,

the impact of the dance is in body-to-body affect [...] which produces an action of the body on itself and leads to a reflexive response. This embodied and reflexive affect again exemplifies a proprioceptive feedback loop, which can lead to embodied cognition (Reynolds, 2012:131).<sup>47</sup>

Reynolds's description of the affective process of watching dance, raises the possibility that viewers of *Acts of Holding* are offered a sensation of moving in and out of the work, which echoes my insider/outsider perspectives as both maker and viewer. There is something about working with the temporal affect

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<sup>47</sup> Reynolds is referring here to live dance, rather than screendance, but I would argue that what she describes as 'body-to-body' affect can still be generated by watching a body onscreen. I am referring here to the argument, explored in Chapter 3, that the potential affectivity of dance need not be located within liveness as a form of spatio-temporal connection between bodies.

of loss, perhaps, rather than a narrative account of the emotional effect of loss that invites what Brannigan refers to as a 'returning gesture' (2011:178) from the viewer. Although the aim is to communicate something of my individual experience of bereavement (and I am not immune to, what Fraleigh refers to as, the 'universalizing impulse' of dance (1987:30)) the artworks' focus is to provoke conditions that generate a temporality of loss in the viewer, rather than offering my emotional response as a singular interpretation of loss. However, both are present in the works perhaps, for as Shaviro argues, with reference to the work of Hardt and Negri,

[p]rivatised emotion can never entirely separate itself from the affect from which it is derived. Emotion is representable and representative; but it also points beyond itself to an affect that works transpersonally and transversally, that is at once singular and common (Shaviro, 2010:4).

The problem remains, however, that although the aim of *Acts of Holding* is to generate an affective understanding of the temporality of loss in the viewer, in the co-generated sense I outline above, I cannot know whether this aim has been achieved, for I cannot speak for other people's experience of the work. What I can analyse, reflect upon, and extrapolate from, however, is the embodied affect the work has on me as I watch it. As I state in the introduction to this commentary, I am the viewer in *Acts of Holding* whose responses form the basis of findings, both within the publications and this subsequent analytic commentary. The performative writing style I employ aims to preserve and expose the epistemological value of my various insider viewer positions (my multiple 'I's) as editor, performer, theorist and mourner. However, I am also an expert maker (an artist) and have developed a trust during my experience of making that what mobilises affect within me will also do so in others. This trust is the bridge, or an affective point of opening perhaps, between others and myself within the choreographic research process. With this in mind, a more precise articulation of *Acts of Holding's* research aim might be that; the aim of

the research is to generate a nuanced affective understanding of the temporality of loss for myself, as I watch the work, with a sense of trust, born out of my expertise as an artist scholar, that the publications will mobilize something of this affect in others whilst acknowledging that I cannot speak with certainty about what this might be. In Chapter 4, as a way of summarising this creative research methodology, I describe it as a process of moving forward without certainty.

This chapter has examined how the personal, academic and artistic discourses work together within *Acts of Holding*, identifying the process whereby knowledge is generated as one of emergence. It examines the complexities and challenges of working with insider/outsider positions and the epistemological precarity of working with both personal discourse and dance. The next chapter takes a detailed look at some of the findings that emerge from this creative interdisciplinary research process, focusing specifically on the insights generated by the publications into the relationship between dance and transience.

### Chapter 3: Precarious Conditions

This chapter considers some of the findings generated by the practice-based research methods employed in *Acts of Holding*, focusing on the relationship between dance and transience.

‘Bodies are always on the verge of departing, about to move, to fall’ (Lingis, 1993:166).

The artworks in *Acts of Holding* generate movements that are immediate, in the sense that they are a direct response to the immediate time and place they emerge within. However, these movements, such as walking, running and reaching are also ingrained, embodied and, in phenomenological terms, long known in the body. In the screen-based artworks, these movements are recorded in a way that accentuates this tension between the here-now and the then-as-now – bound to its time of production. This chapter analyses the dialogue between the immediate responses, embodied movement and temporal capture within the artworks, focusing on the way these exchanges work to cast and re-cast the relationship of dance and transience. Some of the understandings of transience that emerge here informed the publications as they were being generated, some I identify in retrospect, as part of the process of stepping back and trying to identify the contribution to the understanding of temporality of dance and loss that emerges from the publications as a whole.

The artworks in *Acts of Holding* shift between, and construct simultaneous moments of, movement and stillness, structure and contingency, and transience and permanence. For clarity, however, this chapter begins by looking at these temporal qualities separately before going on to consider their combined effect. For example, with reference to Phelan (1993), the first section examines the way the artworks intensify the presence of the dancer (onscreen and off) in order to generate a heightened sense of transience in the viewer. Here I introduce the idea of responsivity as a way of understanding how a sense of live engagement is precariously maintained, particularly by the screen-based



artworks in *Acts of Holding*. The second section examines the ways in which the artworks generate a sense of permanence, reliability and stillness. This section focuses on somatic processes of embodiment and the creation of temporal holding structures within the artworks, which are understood here with reference to the concept of psychoanalytic containment (Winnicott, 1965). In the final section I argue that through intertwining ways of accentuating or resisting the movement of time, the artworks in *Acts of Holding* generate a sense of, what I refer to as, precarity. Precarity is shown here to offer a significant way of thinking about both the temporal affects of loss and of dance. I begin by looking at transience.

### Transience

In an analysis of what he identifies as the post 1950s choreographic turn within contemporary arts, dance writer André Lepecki describes the key qualities of dance as ‘ephemerality, corporeality, precariousness, scoring and performativity’ (2012:15). It is notable that the word ‘score’ is the only one which refers to an inscribed practice, a practice that lasts beyond its time of emergence, and even this device is designed, within each iteration, to produce difference.<sup>48</sup> All of Lepecki’s terms refer to movement and more specifically the emergence of dance within the movement of time; they allude to the mutable nature of dance, of movement ending and changing. Running through these terms is the idea of transience – of dance as an art form that does not stay; an art form associated with loss. In an earlier influential text titled ‘Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance theory’ (2004), Lepecki details the way ‘dance’s self-erasure’ is cast as a ‘powerful trope’ within performance theory and critical studies (2004:131). The idea of dance as an exemplar of transience is also found more widely within what Chadwick (2016), Spatz (2015, 2017), and Winter (2014) amongst others, refer to as a key ‘turn to the body’, that this research contributes to, within recent arts and humanities research.

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<sup>48</sup> Whilst acknowledging the complexity of their relationship, I refer here only to the physical manifestation of the dance rather than its affect.

Transience, coming from the Latin *transient* 'going across', implies a movement from one place to another. It is normally, as the previous point implies, used to describe a moving quality of time, a flow from present to past and from presence to absence. Temporal philosopher, David Johnson describes this normative understanding of transience as essentially teleological in that it involves 'seeing the essence of time in time's end' (2003:209)<sup>49</sup> In their discussions regarding the notion of performative liveness, Mathew Reason (2006) and Harmony Bench (2016) both note that it is this teleological sense of transience, where people and things move from presence to absence, that remains dominant within ontological discussions of dance within dance and performance studies. Johnson goes on to argue, with reference to Bergson's (1911) concept of *durée*, that the experiential intensity of lived-time, where change is seen only as change, rather than a spatialised step towards death, offers a point of resistance to this common teleological sense of transience. Through an analysis of how the artworks generate affect, this chapter maps the way these different understandings of transience, referred to here as transience-as-end and transience-as-change, intertwine within the publications. This mapping points to additional ways of thinking about the movement of time that are referred to, with reference to somatic and psychoanalytic discourse, as forms of temporal containment. Before I get to these however, I begin by introducing Phelan's emphasis on transience-as-end within the field of performance theory that was such an influential part of the research in *Acts of Holding*.

In her seminal text *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), the transient nature of dance (as an integral part of the history of performance art from the Judson group onwards) is cast as an essential part of its ontology. According to Phelan, performance generates a heightened sense of presence because its liveness invites a simultaneous evocation of immanent loss. Drawing on psychoanalytic discourse, Phelan describes this soon-to-be-goneness of

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<sup>49</sup> Johnson argues that the association between transience and endings is notably explored by what he describes as 'pro-transience' philosophers, such as, Heidegger and Bataille (2003:212).

performance as a ‘maniacally charged present’, which connects us with our mortality (1993:148). Phelan’s identification of loss within the intensified present/presence of dance underpins a key premise within *Acts of Holding*. As stated in the introduction, this premise is that just as the trauma of loss can create a heightened sense of transience, so the heightened sense of transience, generated by the intensified present of dance, can provoke a sense of immanent loss in the viewer. In being made aware of the immediate moment in which the movement in *Acts of Holding* emerges, we are invited to become aware that it will soon end – and perhaps are made aware of our mortality.<sup>50</sup> In retrospect, this has always been central to how I have come to understand my practice but has only crystalized in the making of *Acts of Holding*.<sup>51</sup> In the next section I take a detailed look at some of the methods that I now identify as being used to create an intensified sense of presence/ensuing absence within the artworks.

### Body-in-time

In ‘Things that start slowly’ (App. 1) I refer to Stephen Connor’s description of structure as an ‘attempt to defeat transience, by bending it into a pattern’ (1997:124). I refer to it there in order to explore a sense in which dance has the potential to operate beyond its time of emergence, transcending the everyday, in a way that resonates with the idea of an Absolute time.<sup>52</sup> When I trained in dance, for example, I learnt codified and repeatable dance steps, which were practiced as accurately as possible in response to an external idealised form.<sup>53</sup> The aim was for these movement forms to remain the same each time, rather

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<sup>50</sup> By using the singular term ‘movement’ here I do not mean to imply that all the movement in *Acts of Holding* is the same, but rather to suggest it is the relationship of the movement to time, as opposed to its narrative or dynamic qualities, that is of most interest in this research, although I acknowledge that these are of course interconnected.

<sup>51</sup> Phelan’s assertion that we are ‘born ready to mourn’ (1997:5) makes perfect sense to me for I have always felt time, or the transience of time, very intensely. This drives me to save, record, make art and jam.

<sup>52</sup> In her essay ‘Does screendance need to look like dance’ (2009), Kappenberg describes the ability of the trained dancer to resist the mutability of the body, to be able to repeat things in time, as using the ‘body as tool’ (2009: 96). She contrasts this with working with the body-as-site where the choreographer responds to the specificity of the individual body-in-time.

<sup>53</sup> Whilst I acknowledge that contemporary technique training has repeatedly challenged the pedagogic models I refer to here, the example of training with an ideal form-based emphasis, is useful in terms of understanding what the movement in *Acts of Holding* is not.

than, changing in response to the time in which they emerged. The symmetry, and clarity of such forms can generate a comforting sense of stability. It is this stability that I refer to in 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5) (and later on in this chapter) where I write about the joyous sense of security created for me by Gene Kelly's symmetrical dance steps that 'begin, peak and end in ways that feel both immediate and long known [...] transcend[ing] the transient body with its irregularities, and unplanned movement, just as love conquers the rain' (Macdonald, 2017a:22).

The defining feature of codified dance forms, such as Kelly's tap or classical ballet, is, as Fraleigh points out, that it operates 'beyond everyday existence and painful realities' (1987:XXXV). Fraleigh's description of the relationship of classical ballet to time, potentially positions the movement of the untrained body as something transient, and transience is therefore cast as something contingent and unreliable. As Cooper Albright writes '[d]ance is rife with the cultural anxiety that the grotesque body will erupt (unexpectedly) through the image of the classical body, shattering the illusion of ease and grace by the disruptive presence of [...] a dancer's age or mortality' (1997:74)<sup>54</sup> In transcendent dance practices, such as danse d'école, the body-in-time is potentially signalled as the dying body (a moving state of transience-as-end), which training as repetition, and choreographic structure work to resist. It is the dying body that *Acts of Holding* focuses on within its emphasis on the changing body-in-time. For one of the primary ways that the practice in *Acts of Holding* creates the possibility of generating an intensified sense of presentness for the viewer is by bringing attention to the everyday, aging, failing and transforming body-in-time. All bodies move in time, of course, but I go on to look now at the way *Acts of Holding* emphasises the precise physicality of individual bodies in time and space. I look first at how the use of teleological and task-based pedestrian movement generate a durational engagement with the movement in the artworks. I then look at how the use of singular events,

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<sup>54</sup> There is a connection here between what Albright calls the 'grotesque' body (1997:74) and Kristeva's notion of the contingent, 'abject' body (Kristeva, 1982) that I write about in 'Holding and Curation' (App. 4) with reference to the dying body.

and singular filmed measures of those events, work to emphasise their unrepeatable disappearing-as-it-emerges, temporal specificity.

### **Finishing something**

With the exceptions of *This is for you* and *Falling for everything* (Apps. 3 and 4), the artworks in *Acts of Holding* involve pedestrian, rather than codified dance steps.<sup>55</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, this movement is generated in response to task-based scores. In *Walk* (App. 5) for example, the woman's task is to travel across the field. When I watch it I see that it is difficult for her to walk across the uneven ground in her heels and my attention is drawn to the way she navigates these conditions. For the majority of the film her whole body is left intact within a single shot, creating the possibility for the minute adjustments of her balance and alignment in response to that space and time, what Brannigan might refer to as 'micro-choreographies' (2011:46), to come into focus. Although the distinction is not clear cut, the teleological and task-based nature of her actions have the potential to emphasise the kinaesthetic effect of her individual movement as it emerges within time, rather than, its potential function as a carrier of psychological or narrative meaning operating beyond that time.<sup>56</sup> When I watch the work, her minimal pedestrian movement emphasises, what Massumi might call, '[t]he slightness of ongoing qualitative change' (2002:1). They create no narrative shape that might distract from the durational quality of the event, the event, in my understanding of the work as both maker, viewer and bereaved, being the grieving body in time.<sup>57</sup> Neither are there any dynamic moments of virtuosity that divide the time up for me, when I watch it now, into more or less important moments. In 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5) I write about the way these choices in *Walk* work to resist what Deleuze calls the sensory-motor schema of action (Deleuze, 1983:155), found within classic Hollywood films,

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<sup>55</sup> However, there is a parallel, perhaps, in the way *Falling for everything* (App. 4) uses conversational rather than scripted language.

<sup>56</sup> The lineage of this task-based work resonates of course with Susan Sontag's influential collection of essays entitled *Against Interpretation* (1961), which theorised the reclamation of the immediate sensuous surfaces of the artwork as meaningful.

<sup>57</sup> Dideon (2005) notes the prevalence of narratives of healing that pervade the grieving process, despite the fact that it is often the case that nothing moves for a very long time.

where time is structured through the causal 'before' and 'after' of the events that happen within it.<sup>58</sup>

Many of the artworks in *Acts of Holding* set up clear spatio-temporal and conceptual end points, which create the possibility of intensifying a sense of the present moment for the viewer. At the end of *This is for you* (App. 3), for example, the dancer dances slowly down the street until they are out of view and the viewer is invited to experience the time it takes for the dancer to leave them.<sup>59</sup> End-orientated, teleological structures, such as this, within *Acts of Holding's* artworks, invite comparison with what P. Adams Sitney refers to as the 'structural films' (1974:408) of artists such as Andy Warhol and Douglas Gordon, whose films expose the way the apparatus of film generates duration. An example of this that was influential in *Acts of Holding* is Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967), which involves a static camera shot of a loft room where the camera continuously zooms forwards over 45 minutes.<sup>60</sup> In *Wavelength*, however, we do not know the end point that is being moved towards and so, as the viewer, I am still engaged in a narrative of anticipation – even if it is durational in nature. As film theorist Jacob Potemski writes, the temporality of *Wavelength* is reduced down to 'the experience of moving towards a resolution' (2013:9).<sup>61</sup> However, in artworks, such as *Falling for everything* (App. 4), where the constant rate of the diagram's reduction potentially signals the durational end point of the work (as does the diagnosis of the woman who is in it) the end

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<sup>58</sup> Although beyond the scope of this analytic commentary, it would be productive to explore the work in *Acts of Holding* in relation to Maya Deren's (1953) concept of vertical direction in film, where an emphasis on repetition, tone, and movement quality creates 'poetic structures' (Kappenberg, 2013:102), that work to lift films out of causal, horizontal time.

<sup>59</sup> In some instances of the work, the street was long and this section of the work could last up to ten minutes.

<sup>60</sup> An influential screendance work which functions in a similar way is Becky Edmunds's *On the Surface* (2007) where the camera pulls back from a close up of a single figure over several minutes, until the figure can no longer be seen. These different directions are interesting to me. For example, as my mother was dying she thought we were leaving her and we thought she was leaving us.

<sup>61</sup> In *Wavelength* as in *Walk* (App. 5) we do not reach an end but instead go back around to the start point – a process that Potemski (2013) writes about in terms of Deleuze's time-image, as I do in 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5).

point is perhaps more evident, locating the experience of the event more clearly for me as the viewer, in an intensified present.

'Going Nowhere' (App. 5), refers to the affective nature of teleological filmic structures when considering the way death intensifies the present in the time before dying. Here, with reference to the concepts of Kairos and Chronos, as used by palliative care specialist Anna Mendes (2014), I write about the time before death as a form of moving stillness, a place of stasis, rather than, time moving forwards towards an end.<sup>62</sup> The philosopher Gary Peters (after Heidegger) describes this time before dying as a kind of thickened present – a consolidating structure to console those who are left behind (2004:224). Here, instead of Phelan's idea of presence intensifying a sense of loss, immanent loss can be seen as that which intensifies presence (although these states may be inextricably bound together).

### **Singular measures of time**

A sense of transience-as-end experienced within an intensified present, is also invited by the scores used in *Acts of Holding*, which are designed to emphasise the unrepeatable nature of both the movement that emerges in that moment and the moment in which the movement is generated. For example, to find the participants for *I will not hope* (App. 2), invitations were made to people I knew, people who would be willing to come at short notice, because leave it too late (no pun intended) and all the leaves would be gone, come early and none would fall. We all watched the weather reports. Emphasising the spatial and temporal specificity of one moment, the moment when these leaves fell, for example, is a way of emphasising that it will never happen again. In this sense the artworks potentially position themselves, to use Phelan's words, as 'that which disappears' (2003:293), reaching out as they emerge towards an inevitable end.

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<sup>62</sup> Kairos, as opposed to the metric time of Chronos, is an ancient Greek term, which refers to the act of bringing all that you are to one moment (Mendes, 2014:166).

Although I could make the leaf catching film again next autumn, for I know that autumn is going to come round again and I could walk across a field again to make *Walk* (App. 5), if I waited long enough for another storm to come. What I could not do is generate the shot used in the central frame of *Things that start slowly* (App. 1), where my oldest child had her final feed from my breast. Neither could I make *Falling for everything* (App. 4) again because the terminally ill woman who I worked with has since died. It would also be hard to re-find the same off-balance, excited and yet careful movement, that emerged from my sense of potentially being pregnant, in *Snow film* (App. 1). In saying this I am of course making ontological choices about what does or does not constitute the artwork.<sup>63</sup> The leaf catchers in autumn I clearly see as having the capacity to be the same again, however, although I could locate another terminally ill person to work with, I would not see this film in this way. Potentially this is because *Falling for everything* (App. 4) places more of an emphasis on the individual presence of the subject whereas *I will not hope* (App. 2), operates more readily as metaphor – signifying something beyond the specific time of the event.

Many of the events in *Acts of Holding* are filmed using single shots, which invite the viewer to experience the original duration of the event. Filming one iteration of what are often essentially performative events accentuates, what I refer to in 'Things that start slowly' (App. 1) as, the 'deep anxieties that underlie all processes of capture' (Macdonald, 2013a:2) that pervades film. For, as writers such as Mulvey and Doane note, film is bound to its time of production and has no choice other than to acknowledge the loss of what it records. In this sense film is irrevocably connected to the idea of transience-as-end, for it cannot be other than that which has already ended. In *Acts of Holding* the choice to record these events within, what screendance artist Miranda Pennell refers

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<sup>63</sup> I am interested in what difference it makes that the baby is my own in *Things that start slowly* (App. 1) and how the artwork would operate for me, and others, if it were not? It raises the question of whether I consider the artworks autobiographical. It is notable that I have avoided this term in the writing. This is because the artworks are not ostensibly about my experience (although they inevitably are, in part, because they are drawn from my experience) but rather use my experience to generate affect.



to as, a singular ‘measure of time’ (2012:76), works to further emphasise their temporal specificity.<sup>64</sup> In the article (App. 4) accompanying *Falling for everything*, for example, I write about the choice to use a single audio recording of one of the conversations with the subject of the film, as opposed to a composite edit of several meetings.<sup>65</sup> This choice was a deliberate one aimed at honouring the specificity of our exchanges by avoiding an attempt to summarise or transcend individual moments of time within an edited overview. Similarly in *Walk* (App. 5), the continuity style edits cutting to a close up of the walker’s legs, for example, and later again to her head and shoulders, are not achieved by editing together separate measures of time, as in traditional continuity editing within narrative film, but by enlarging one existing single shot. The enlargement of the existing shot is very visible in the resulting grainy pixelated image, and has the potential to emphasise both that it remains part of the original measure of time and the impossibility of returning to that time.

As discussed in Chapter 1, both *Walk* (App. 5) and *Falling for everything* (App. 4) treat the time of the shot as a found object. The long single shots used in *Acts of Holding* resist what Cull describes (after Bergson) as ‘our tendency to spatialize time and divide up movement’ (2011:89), which, like Gene Kelly’s sublimely structured movement I refer to earlier on, potentially ‘takes us away from reality’ (ibid).<sup>66</sup> In honouring the body-in-time, they go against the grain of much contemporary screendance work which, through using multiple edits to construct time, generate, what Douglas Rosenberg refers to as, ‘an impossible body [...] not encumbered by gravity, temporal restraints, or death’ (2012:10). In his book *Inscribing movement* (2012), Rosenberg goes on to provocatively

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<sup>64</sup> In a conventional, touring contemporary dance performance the movement is developed and rehearsed beforehand and then performed several times for different audiences. The time of its performance is important of course but not essential to its effect – in this sense it is repeatable – a point that is explored by Graham McFee in his aesthetic delineation between performance as type/token (1992).

<sup>65</sup> Although there is not space to explore it here, the original diegetic sound of the events is used in the majority of the works and forms an important part of placing the viewer within the affective space time of the event.

<sup>66</sup> Where there are edited sequences, such as the fast trajectory edits of *I will not Hope* (App. 2), these are constructed from footage from multiple cameras simultaneously filming one event.

compare the cut of the edit within screendance, and subsequent re-animation of the body onscreen, to an act of surgery, decorporealising and then recorporealising the body. Kappenberg, echoing the sentiments of Melo and Sutil (2016), suggests that this process of recorporealisation acts as a way of escaping the failures of the mortal in-time body, and forms part of an 'ongoing idealization of mobility in the art form' (2009:103).

Whilst it is clear, as Rosenberg argues, that some examples of screendance do act to undo, 'the temporal nature of "choreography"' (2012:57). I would argue, perhaps more in line with Kappenberg, that these qualities are methodological rather than ontological because the majority of the artworks in *Acts of Holding* are screendances that embrace the failure and mortality of the body. When cuts are made in these works, they do not serve to eliminate uncertainty or physical limitations, instead they involve images of imbalance that potentially offer literal and metaphorical way of thinking about the in-time body reacting to events as they appear to it through time.<sup>67</sup> I was interested to find several years later that Barthes describes mourning as a process of stumbling (Barthes, 2010:40), for stumbling implies coming across events that you have not anticipated – a way of moving that lacks the certainty of assumptive patterns of movement and time. This image echoes an emerging connection in *Acts of Holding*, between physical imbalance, a sense of non-directional movement of time after loss, a psychoanalytic failure to contain, and epistemological uncertainty that shows potential for further exploration. For example, in 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5), I suggest that the balanced nature of Gene Kelly's movement and the centred feel of his position at the centre of the screen, reflects his ideological position 'at the centre of the universe' (Macdonald, 2017a:19). In the same article, I compare this with my unsteady progression in *Walk* (App. 5) as

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<sup>67</sup> Although there is not space to address this here, I am aware of the resonance the practice in *Acts of Holding* has with discourse on the poetics of failure within contemporary performance practice – see Bailes, S. (2011) *Performance theatre and the poetics of failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service*. London: Routledge.

someone reacting to each change in the surface I walk on as it appears to me, unbalanced by the loss of someone I relied upon.<sup>68</sup>

So far I have examined the way the artworks in *Acts of Holding* invite an intensified sense of presence in the viewer, through emphasising the specific movement of the body-in-time. I have argued that the combination of task-based pedestrian movement, singular events/shots, and teleological structures invite an intense engagement with the soon-to-be-gone duration of the movement. I suggest that these devices invite what Phelan, refers to as, a 'slow' way of looking, which has the potential to bring the viewer back 'as the approach of death often does, to the 'original intensity' of the everyday' (1997:161). They invite me to become aware of my own body in time as I watch and this heightened sense of transience is like that which I experienced after loss. The following section explores what happens in these moments in more depth.

### Responsivity

The use of task-based scores in *Acts of Holding*, means that both the conditions (the environment and score that generate the artwork) and the physical responses that result from these conditions are available to the viewer in the final artworks. It is possible to see that in *I will not hope* (App. 2), for example, the aim is for the leaf catchers to catch leaves. We can see the leaves fall and we can see the movements participants make in order to try to catch them.<sup>69</sup> The work shows exact movements produced from changeable conditions. This overtly immediate, responding-in-the-present-moment-that-we-are-looking-at, movement creates an intensified 'now' for me as I watch. For example, the leaf catching day was a day of movement and possibility. I find it uplifting to look at now, despite the fact that this 'now' is actually a 'then' seen as 'now' as encountered on film. This is because the affective nature of this movement, I would argue, does not rely on the immediacy of its generation or reception, for

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<sup>68</sup> Images of falling run through *Acts of Holding*.

<sup>69</sup> The score underpinning the work, outlining the task, is clearly articulated in the programme note accompanying the work.

all movement (even if it is rehearsed for years before hand) emerges at a particular moment in time, it resides instead in seeing a body changing in response to change.

I refer to this affective condition in this writing, in retrospect here, as a form of responsivity, and argue that it is a physical quality that runs through the work in *Acts of Holding*. In *This is for you*, for example, the movement is generated in response to the forms of the street in negotiation with the density of people passing, the objects left in the space, the rubbish left behind or parked cars. In response to the performance, people often spoke of their fascination with seeing the dancer's interaction with the architecture and people in the street.<sup>70</sup> Reflecting on my experience of viewing the artworks, in retrospect now, it is not, perhaps, simply transience as an intensified sense of presence that they bring to my attention, it is transience-as-change, within the mutable and responsive body.

*This is for you* is performed live but a responsive quality is also present in the recorded works in *Acts of Holding*. One example of this is found in a section of *Things that start slowly* (App. 1), which involves myself, and Penny Collinson as dancers using a remote control to zoom the camera towards and away from our movement, which we try to constantly re-frame for the constantly changing frame. As I write about in the article associated with the work (App. 1), every time one of us moved our body, or the camera, we would have to re-orientate and this would then cause more movement.<sup>71</sup> The task generated an on-going loop of change and response to change. Although not conscious of it at the time, I was clearly influenced here by Miranda Pennell's seminal work *You made me Love you* (2005), which sees a group of 15-20 dancers vie with each other in order to gaze into the lens of a camera that is moving repeatedly from side to

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<sup>70</sup> After each performance of *This is for you* (App. 3) people were invited to have a drink in a nearby café and write in response to what they had seen. This was done as a way of holding people's experience of the work, creating a buffer between the event and the rest of their day.

<sup>71</sup> This process of constant reorientation was made more complex (more disorientating) by placing the monitor that we could see ourselves in to one side of us, so we were filmed and played back from different locations.

side. They stumble over each other like a small herd, hyperaware of each change in direction and in their own visibility, following the lure of the camera. In responding to things as they emerge, despite being recorded, the movement in Pennell's screendance and this section of *Things that start slowly* (App. 1) invites a quality of in-timeness and in-liveness. I do not rehearse Auslander's (2012) famous challenge to Phelan's work, concerning the historical origin of notions of 'liveness' here, for whilst I acknowledge their connected nature, *Acts of Holding* is concerned with generating the affect of presence rather than investigating its ontological status. However, it is with reference to Auslander that I refer to the screen-based artworks in *Acts of Holding* as 'live recordings' because the 'liveness of the experience of listening to or watching the recording is primarily affective' (Auslander, 2012:5), rather than something generated through spatial or temporal connection. Part of this liveness is produced, I would argue, by this sense of responsivity where we are allowed to see the body-in-time respond to events in time. It is significant that, unlike a live recording of an existing performance, the artworks in *Acts of Holding* are only made to be performed live for film. This is a live recording of something that will not happen again – a singular performance caught in a singular measure of time.<sup>72</sup> This complicates traditional distinctions in screendance between dance that is made for live performance and then filmed, and dance that is made for, and generated by, the apparatus of film.<sup>73</sup> These works operate somewhere between presence and absence. Like John Smith's *Girl Chewing Gum* (1976),<sup>74</sup> which I came across half way through the research, they both exploit and complicate the apparent capacity of the single shot to point to the world as it unfolds (Doane, 2002).

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<sup>72</sup> In this way the artworks in *Acts of Holding* are reminiscent of works by moving image artists, such as Ellie Rees's *Reader, I married him* (2008) and *Slow* (2013) by Karel Van Laere, who perform singular acts for single shots.

<sup>73</sup> Marisa Zanotti offers another take on this blurring of liveness and film in *Passing Strange and Wonderful* (2012). It is a film of Ben Wright's original live duet of the same name, which is recorded using multiple single shot takes, of two different casts. The result is a thought provoking mixture of the individual variation, the liveness, of each dancer and a highly constructed film event.

<sup>74</sup> In this film, voice over is used to destabilise the relationship between 'real time' and the time of the film.

The constant movement in this improvised section of *Things that start slowly* (App. 1) offers the potential of constant change, a condition that is central to the celebration of the mutable body within the somatic practices that underpin *Acts of Holding*. Emma Meehan, for example, writes of the 'core values of responsivity and adaptation' within Authentic Movement practice, which she argues 'elicit a capacity for change' (2015:324). In this improvisation in *Things that start slowly* (App. 1), the significance of dance and transience is found, potentially, not as with Phelan, in the fact that movement disappears as it manifests, but rather in the fact that the lived body-in-time, changes through time. There are potential similarities between the somatic body gaining significance from its mutability, rather than its ephemerality, and Cull's description (after Deleuze 2001) of the transient body as a place of immanence, a place of endless possibility and change that eludes closure. In her article 'Attention Training' (2011), Cull locates this quality of immanence within the attentive apparatus of the body. Here she is writing about a quality of attentiveness that she argues is created by the participatory scores of Alan Kaprow.<sup>75</sup> Cull suggests that Kaprow's scores invite people to respond to change and flow within their body 'as a site of lived change [...] as immanent or embedded in, rather than transcendent to, the world as change' (2011:87). Looking back now, Cull's immanent attention resonates with the somatic intimentness required by the scores used in *Acts of Holding*, for these artworks demand an intense responsivity to the changing moment from me, both when I was a dancer within some of them, and when I watch them now as a viewer.

In retrospect, the notion of transience-as-change, of something that keeps moving but does not reach a final point, is central to *Acts of Holding*. In *Things that start slowly* (App. 1), however, the immanent body responding to change is cast as a site of trauma rather than potential. In the article associated with it, I argue that these responsive sequences in *Things that start slowly* create a sense

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<sup>75</sup> Here Cull writes of Kaprow's desire to move from the creation of art as a fixed object, to be consumed by a passive observer, to art as a changeable event in life to be participated in. Cull connects this with the Bergson's notion of time as 'indivisible change' (2011:80) as inscribed within the Deleuzian notion of immanence.

of continuous 'now', as opposed to the marked then and now of edited, linear narrative flows. A state, which I suggest, resonates with the unarticulated timelessness, the moving stillness, of loss (Macdonald, 2013a). Looking back, this work lacks the sense of transformation found in Meehan's description of somatic attention within Authentic Movement practice. In this work, perhaps, transience-as-change offers only change, rather than, change as a form of progression.<sup>76</sup>

There is another important difference between the notion of somatic attentiveness, Cull's description of Kaprow's immanent participation, and the quality of responsivity potentially generated by some of the artworks in *Acts of Holding*. Essentially this is because the artworks are about responding to something that happens rather than attending to change. Responding implies that you do not lead. It lacks the active forward movement of enquiry, albeit moving towards that which is unknown, within somatic attention. Responding to something can also be seen as lacking the sense of choice and anxiety inherent in Cull's attentiveness. Whilst acknowledging the nuanced and interrelated nature of these distinctions,<sup>77</sup> I would argue, looking back at this work, that the movement within this section of *Things that start slowly* (App. 1) lacks the quality of somatic attention and intention, for as a dancer, I was not following somatic desire, but reacting to events. Here I am differentiated between attending, which I see as an intentional and interested way of responding to events, such as other people, thoughts or sounds, that I associate with somatic practices such as authentic movement, and responding, which I am associating with a situation where events intrude uninvited into one's experience. One speaks of desire, perhaps, and the other of disruption.

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<sup>76</sup> A sense of time constantly moving is also generated by the continuous tilt shot that runs through *Snow film*, moving from earth to sky. I find the constant movement both comforting and relentless. It reminds me that it is both possible to, and impossible not to, move on.

<sup>77</sup> It should be acknowledged that there are emerging observations that stem from looking back at the publications as a whole, that I would like to develop further after this point.

Responding, rather than attending, to events as they occur through time suggests a level of unpredictability and a lack of agency.<sup>78</sup> It casts the constant movement of time within transience-as-change as something un-patterned, unpredictable and contingent.<sup>79</sup> Again I am referring here to phenomena that are unexpected and, perhaps, unwelcome. Contingency is a recurring theme through the research that emerges in 'Editing I Will Not Hope' (App. 2), which explores the edit as the point 'between predictability, stillness and death, and contingency, movement and life' (Macdonald, 2013b:190) within screendance. In the introduction to *The Medium of Contingency* (2011), the art writer Robin Mackay states that,

unlike the etymology of 'chance' and 'aleatory', which relate to 'falling' – *cadentia*, *alea*, the fall of a dice, the eventuality of one of a number of possible outcomes (the faces of the die) – 'contingency' comes from *contingere*, meaning 'to befall' – it is an event that happens *to us*, that comes from outside, that simply 'strikes' without any possible prevision. (Mackay, 2011:1)

Drawing on Mackay's description of contingency, in 'Editing I Will Not Hope' (App. 2), the concept of contingency, where events 'befall' you without warning, is linked with a state of bereavement, of being struck by something that happens to you. The artworks in *Acts of Holding* were not about contingency as a form of possibility for they were made in response to loss, of something that happened *to me*. When we filmed the improvisation in *Things that start slowly* (App. 1), for example, I was five months pregnant and I associate the constant shifting of our movement with the hyper-vigilance that came from a pregnancy following miscarriage. It was between the making of this work and *I will not hope* (App. 2) that I encountered Doane's articulation of the idea of contingency in relation to death and film within her influential book *The Emergence of*

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<sup>78</sup> Although an instinctive reaction to an event has its own form of agency perhaps.

<sup>79</sup> In the voice-over used in *Things that start slowly* (Appendix 1) this quality of responsiveness is described as being a shift within which "the idea that anything can happen becomes a frightening place, rather than an exciting place of potential" (Macdonald, 2010).



*Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (2002). It encapsulated something important for me regarding the sense of precarity I experienced after loss, for here Doane writes that '[d]eath and the contingent have something in common in so far as both are often situated as that which is unassimilable to meaning' (2002:145), resisting pattern and structure. Doane describes the unpatterned single shot as a form that invites a sense of contingency because without the protection of narrative construction, one is aware when one watches that anything can happen. One of those ever-present possibilities of life is of course death, and so the contingent single shot maintains a possibility of immanent loss even though the person in it is of course already gone. As such Doane's use of the term contingency offers another understanding (in addition to Phelan's) of the connection between liveness and loss in *Acts of Holding*.

Connor's image of structure, as an act of 'bending transience into a pattern' (1997:124), that I began this section with, supports the idea of transience as a form of contingency, for it suggests something unruly that might spring back out of shape at any point. Contingency described something of my experience of time after grief because here I suffered from, what psychotherapist Caroline Garland describes as, 'a profound loss of belief in the predictability of the world' (2002:11). The author Julian Barnes stated that '[g]rief, seems at first to destroy not just all patterns, but also to destroy a belief that a pattern exists' (Barnes 2013, cited in Brockes, 2013:online) and in *Walk* (App. 5) there is no more moving forwards because death has broken the link between movement, time, and progression. The jump cut in *Walk*, which transports the woman back to the start of the shot feels like, an act of severance, jolting me, as the viewer, and disrupting the expected linear development of the walk from left to right.<sup>80</sup>

In this section I have introduced the responsive quality of the movement in *Acts of Holding*, which I argue is key to the affective sense of presence generated by its artworks. I have considered how this quality of responsivity can work to

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<sup>80</sup> In his article about the phenomenology of loss, DuBose describes bereavement as an act of 'immediate severance' (1997:368).

create states both of potential change and contingency in the viewer. The next section will consider two ways in which the artworks resist the idea of transience-as-change.

### **Holding time**

There are similarities between the pattern-less state of contingency and the endless change of immanence, of transience-as-change, as discussed earlier with reference to Cull. In a temporality of immanence, death is no longer a structural divide but simply a further moment of change. Although there is not space here to address the complexity of her work, this idea returns in Harmony Bench's recent discussion of what she refers to as the enduring 'ephemeral tense' of intermedial dance events, which she argues offer no distinctions between presence and absence (2016:157). This idea is made concrete in Calle's extraordinary 2007 artwork entitled *pas pu saisir la mort* (couldn't catch death) where we carefully watch footage of her mother's death, trying to work out the point of death, the point dividing movement and stillness that remains strangely unclear. There is a part of *Accumulation with Talking plus Watermotor* (1979) where Trisha Brown famously says something akin to 'between this move and this move my father died'.<sup>81</sup> Phelan has written about this and noted the open temporal structure this implies, the suggestion that there is not one singular point separating life and death but a period of time where one form becomes another (2004:17).

On a conceptual level, I recognise the attraction of immanence, and in 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5) I focus particularly on how the moving stillness of the time before death resonates with immanence as a place between 'what is 'no longer' and what is 'not yet'' (Lomax, 2006:30).<sup>82</sup> However, I find it difficult to reconcile this concept with the embodied experience of dancing and the embodied experience of loss, for there is something breathtakingly final about death. *Say something back*, the title of Riley's book, testifies to the stubborn insistence of

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<sup>81</sup> The text varies greatly in different performances of the work and this line does not also feature.

<sup>82</sup> Lomax's article makes explicit reference here to the Deleuzian concept of the interval (1985).

the dead to remain dead and not respond to entreaties to return. The dead may continue to respond on film but they are unresponsive to us.

Whilst the emphasis of the in-timeness of the body in the artworks in *Acts of Holding*, as I have suggested above, encourages a sense of perpetual change and contingency, arguably it also simultaneously re-states the limitations of the body-in-time, the main limitation of course being death. For example, as discussed at the start of this chapter, although the majority of the artworks in *Acts of Holding* do not use codified movement to transcend time, they are still given shape by the limitations of the body. Beyond any inbuilt teleological structures in the artworks, as a dancer in many of the films, I am aware of being towards death every time I dance,<sup>83</sup> as, when I get tired I have to stop and there is no way round this (whether it is being filmed or not).<sup>84</sup> In *Things that Start Slowly* (App. 1), for example, the form of the film followed the temporality of the event and the temporality of the event was intrinsically corporeal, rather than metric, as it was based upon my baby breastfeeding until she was full. This is what geographer David Loy refers to as 'event time' (2001:275), as opposed to metric time, where the embodied action dictates the duration of the event.

Endings are found throughout the artworks – images are offered and then removed, people walk out of the frame, movement tasks are completed, and dancers move out of sight and do not return. What the research in *Acts of Holding* points to, in the way it honours the temporal limitations of the body, is that transience-as-end, the state or fact of lasting only for a short time, is a fundamental part of dance's temporal structure and that this is as important as its capacity to move.<sup>85</sup> As Maitland writes, 'limitation in the form of the lived-

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<sup>83</sup> With reference to Heidegger's notion of Dasein – see footnote 85.

<sup>84</sup> I am aware that this raises an ontological distinction between when I am or am not dancing.

<sup>85</sup> Looking back, although I was not aware of this at the time, the image of the woman standing motionless at the left of the screen looking towards the far edge in *Walk* (App. 5), looks like an illustration of Dasein, what Heidegger calls our state of being towards death, exemplifying what Johnson refers to as Heidegger's teleological sense of transience as end (2003). According to Johnson – Heidegger's sense of the lived-time of the body is shot through with mortal finitude and death is the affordance that defines our experience of time. For Heidegger, acknowledging

body provides the very structure by which we can be at all' (1995:141), alluding to the mortal medium of dance that provides its ontological form. In 'Editing I Will Not Hope' (App. 2) I explore, with reference to Doane, the way endings create structure, shaping time but only at the expense of the movement, a process Lepecki refers to as '[c]horeography as mourning' (2004:127). Here transience-as-end is cast as part of the body's reliability – for its affordances generate something to rely on. As Trisha Brown writes, as a dancer 'you are just stuck with your feet on the ground' (Brown in Stephano 1974:20) and this is true whether you are being filmed or not.

There is something about the constant movement of Cull's immanence, which, like the sense of contingency I experienced after loss, evokes for me an unbounded sense of time in free-fall; for what can you rely on if everything is constantly moving? It was in the making of *This is for you* (App. 3) that I became interested in using the constraints of the body-as-structure as a way of negating the potential anxiety generated by movement. This work was informed by the psychoanalytic model of maternal containment (Winnicott, 1965, Ettinger, 1996), which proposes that structures in the present moment can serve to connect us with early foundational experiences of being psychologically and physically held. This discourse, which informs important work in dance therapy and Authentic Movement practice,<sup>86</sup> offers a productive way of understanding why structures, boundaries and limitations in choreographic contexts can generate feelings of safety, which, as discussed in Chapter 4, has the potential to be developed much further. In 'Holding and Curation' (App. 4) I focus on boundaries as a form of containment (holding the contingent body) within both the form of the work and the process of making it. In 'Touch, containment and consolation in *This is for you*' (App. 3), I examine the way the act of touch brought attention to the boundary of the skin and physical limitations of the body, holding me as the dancer in the work. I refer to these containment

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the end point invites us to focus on the experience of duration as intensified present and it is only through acknowledging our inescapable finitude that we can live time authentically.

<sup>86</sup> See Linda Hartley's *Wisdom of the Moving Body* (1989).

structures as forms that make us safe; safe enough to feel our contingent mortality.

The publications refer to the way the body can hold time. For example, 'Going Nowhere' (App. 5) refers to the way the somatic process of temporal embodiment (as seen within my re-walking of my walk) resists an emphasis on transience-as-end, by allowing the body to incorporate rather than erase each moment of time it experiences. This research draws on the notion of schema (Johnson, 2007), which are embodied patterns of movement that accumulate through time and inform each new moment. In somatic terms all movement is an act of return in that, as Timo Klemola writes, although dance may only emerge within the present, '[i]n a very tangible way, the body brings the past to the present' (1991:73).<sup>87</sup> Here we see the idea of the moving body generating an intensified present but one that respond not to loss, as with Phelan, but to growth, for this present is thickened by bringing the past into the future.<sup>88</sup>

### **Precarity**

The first part of this chapter examined the ways the artworks generated a heightened sense of transience for the viewer. In this last section I have argued that they also offer ways of holding time. In the publications, I write about the way this combination creates a sense of moving stillness, a place that oscillates between contingency, potential, predictability and structure.<sup>89</sup> In retrospect, what emerges for me from this combination of epistemological and kinaesthetic movement and stillness, in the artworks, is a sense of precarity. The word precarity suggests a sense of contingency, but not in the true sense of the word because precarity has to be dependent on something, albeit precariously. In

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<sup>87</sup> Lepecki refers to this 'persisting while facing the demands of absence' (2012:16) as being central to the ontology of dance.

<sup>88</sup> 'Things that start slowly' (App. 1) compares the process of embodying time with the possibility of the body to incorporate loss. It examines the possibility of moving forwards, taking something of what was lost with you, even if this is only the sense of absence. In this work, and others, the future does not erase the present in a linear succession; instead, the artwork is built on layers of time where all parts of the process accumulate.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>89</sup> There is a potential connection here with Maya Deren's (1946) concept of an unstable equilibrium (see Freitag, 2016), as a state of managed constant movement, which would be productive for future research.

writing about the political dimension of dance Rebekah Kowal et al. refer to dancer and sociologist Randy Martin's assertion that 'precarity bears its own undoing. It teeters between prayer (precor) and debt (precarious)' (Martin 2012, cited in Kowal et al., 2017:10). Here Kowal suggests that precarity denotes a debt to an external force, it is reliant on something, an anchor point if you will. Contingency, conversely, is reliant on nothing. The anchor points in the artworks in *Acts of Holding* are both the constancy of the body's movement in time, and the end points, structures and constraints of the body itself. It is this that I can rely on.

Precariousness is one of dance's key qualities that Lepecki identifies in the list that I began this chapter with and precarity is the term I choose now in retrospect, at the end of this research, to describe the temporality of loss and part of the temporal affect of dance. There is a sense of precarity created, for me as I watch, by the responsive movement of the dancer in time within *Acts of Holding*. This operates on a kinaesthetic level within the images of imbalance, for example, but it also operates on an epistemological level for the indeterminate nature of some of the movement is not negated by the medium of film. Fixing these events in time via the medium of film does not work to fix them epistemologically, for, as Brannigan writes, when watching screendance, '[w]e are called upon to improvise our response as we follow a trace of movements that we will never quite master, a choreography that will elude us each time despite the replay option' (2011:178).<sup>90</sup>

Precarity also exists in *Acts of Holding* on a level of belief. In writing of the liveness of digital interactions, Auslander argues that we agree to the demands of the artwork, to see it as live, that we are complicit in engaging with its movement as if we are seeing it in the moment. Auslander argues that our ability to, what he calls, 'hold on' to this sense of participatory liveness is 'a willed and fragile act' that requires constant attention to sustain (2012:8). It is a tenuous hold and has a quality of 'precariousness' (ibid). In retrospect, I see this

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<sup>90</sup> Just as film does not make events more reliable, only more repeatable.

as a crucial part of the effect of the artworks in *Acts of Holding* for, when I watch them, I hang on to the sense that the body onscreen is still alive. As their maker I offer long periods of single shots and responsive movement that invite this connection with myself as the primary viewer and then I chose to break it with an edit that disconnects them, returning them to the constructed, already gone, temporal limits of the event. For example, it is noticeable that the artworks are nearly all ended by using the credits to cut back sharply to everyday time. Some of these returns generate a sense of violence, such as, the end of *Things that start slowly* (App. 1), when the sound of the sea and the image of the baby that has been present, for what feels like such a long time, are suddenly removed.

This chapter has considered the way the artworks in *Acts of Holding* invite and resist the movement of time. It examines the way the artworks' responsive movement, embodied movement and temporal structures work to generate states of contingency, potential and containment for the viewer. Within it I have argued that, whilst the transience of dance generates a sense of possibility and contingency, it is also transience that creates physical affordances that generate structure and reliability. I have proposed the idea of precarity to describe the state of moving stillness in the artworks in *Acts of Holding* and as a way of thinking about living with loss.

## Chapter 4: What can I rely on?

*Acts of Holding* began as a response to my lived-experience of the time leading up to, and after, bereavement. It involves a body of practice-based research, and accompanying articles, that draw on this personal experience in order to generate and analyse an embodied understanding of temporal qualities connected to loss. The research examines the resonance between the temporality of loss and the temporal affect of dance, in order to enrich understandings of the relationship between dance, loss, time and affect. This final chapter considers the limits of the research, its contribution to the fields of dance, screendance, film and grief studies, and the potential for future lines of enquiry.

The publications in *Acts of Holding* point to the significant role that loss plays in dance's effect. As shown in Chapter 3, affective connections between dance and loss, housed within the concept of transience, are not new. Dance writers such as, Fraleigh (1987, 2004), Parviainen (2002), Kozel (2007), and Lepecki (2012), all focus on dance's (contested) ephemerality in their exploration of both its ontology and affect. *Acts of Holding* is a distinctive addition to this literature in two main ways. Firstly, it offers a detailed examination of dance and loss that draws on personal embodied experiences of bereavement, rather than a conceptualised idea of transience. Secondly, it employs choreographic research methods that create an embodied understanding of different temporal states connected to loss for the viewer. The result is a unique body of research that provides detailed practice-based interventions into the discursive literature of dance and transience outlined above. The findings of this research, housed within the publications and subsequent commentary, demonstrate the capacity for the temporal affect of bereavement and the temporal affect of dance to refine and enrich understandings of one another.

As explored in Chapter 3, *Acts of Holding* generates insight into the way a sense of time, connected to loss, is created by its artworks. Responding to the



personal experience of loss that initiated the research, these findings can be broadly separated into choreographic devices that generate a sense of the movement and stillness of time, and those used to intensify the presence of the body in time. The first set of findings focuses on ways of spatialising and not spatialising time – using movement that does not end, edits that create a sense of forward movement, and material/images that hold many layers of time within one time. The second group involves the use of movement-based temporalities that intensify the presence of the aging, failing body in time. Some of the devices used to generate these movement-based temporalities include teleological structures that emphasise corporeal limitations, and singular measures of filmed time that expose the body's qualities of imbalance and uncertainty.

The practice-based findings in *Acts of Holding* impact, and draw upon, psychoanalytic and philosophical temporal theory embedded within film and screendance discourse, as well as reaching beyond to palliative care and grief studies. These diverse discourses interact within iterative and cyclical research processes that do not easily lead to singular propositional statements that address a singular issue within a particular field.<sup>91</sup> Instead, as explored in Chapters 1 and 2, *Acts of Holding's* intermodal and interdisciplinary methodology acts as a holding space where different ways of knowing are intertwined and individually honoured. This holding space generates pools of insight into temporal states connected to both bereavement and dance. The most significant of which I consider to be the emerging themes of responsivity, precarity and holding.

### **Responsivity**

Chapter 3 proposes the temporal state of responsivity as a key quality of both the grieving body and the affective body on film. Here the term responsivity is used to articulate the hypervigilant, contingent state of the bereaved body in time. This quality is also located in the affective presence of the mutable body

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<sup>91</sup> This is also a reflection of the hybrid nature of the practice.

within the artworks of *Acts of Holding*. This research enriches writing on embodied affect and screendance by authors such as Wood (2015) and Friedland (2016), which has tended to focus on the responsive quality of the body of the viewer, rather than the affective responsive quality of the performer's movement. This work also adds to ontological understandings of liveness within screendance, for it proposes responsivity as a dimension of presence that does not rely on a spatio-temporal connection between dancer and viewer. Although an uncoupling of presence and liveness is found in the work of dance writers, such as Susan Kozel (2007) and Harmony Bench (2016), concerning intermedial dance practice, the work on responsivity within *Acts of Holding* reconfigures distinctions between live and 'recorporealized' dance within the field of screendance (Rosenberg, 2012:15).<sup>92</sup>

It would be useful now to pursue the notable resonances between the responsive filmed body in *Acts of Holding*, generating presence long after its time of emergence, and Bench's proposal for a performative 'ephemeral tense' where '[t]he present lasts for as long as it endures (or must be endured)' (Bench, no date:6).<sup>93</sup> Bench writes of a sense of duration, generated by technical reproducibility/proliferation, which works to resist Phelan's delineation between presence and absence within performative time. What *Acts of Holding* adds to this narrative is the notion of endurance within the moving stillness of loss, within trauma, where time moves but does not move forwards. The artworks offer a moving stillness that reflects a temporality of loss, where one remains half with the dead and half with the living. The embodied, durative quality of the artworks, written into their names, such as *Walk* and *Falling for everything*, signify their potential to resist 'reduction to either liveness or disappearance' (Bench, no date:9).

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<sup>92</sup> This line of enquiry, although emerging, also resonates with Kappenberg's (2009) call for screendance to be more in-time, to be more responsive to the world around it.

<sup>93</sup> There are interesting overtones of trauma within Bench's choice of the word 'endured' which she does not pursue here but are present in Schnieder's (2001) article 'Performance Remains' which Bench refers to.

### **Holding**

In her book entitled *Closer*, Kozel introduces what she calls a ‘poetics of responsivity’ (Kozel, 2009:xviii), which positions the responsive interaction between technology and the body as a creative state of endless possibility. *Acts of Holding’s* focus on the contingent quality of responsivity, as a condition of bereavement, brings a darker dimension to Kozel’s poetics, a dimension, which is also often overlooked in the prevalent celebration of the mutable body within wider critical theory. In her recent article ‘Not-knowing: mobility as a state of unrest’ (2018). Cauchat acknowledges the contingent, unknowing dimension of the lived body in time. Here Cauchat asks ‘which conditions can keep precariousness from turning into disaster?’ (2018:42) or rather ‘[w]hat do we need to be able to dance?’ (ibid). *Acts of Holding* offers a potential answer to this question in its exposition of the capacity of dance to hold time.

As discussed in Chapter 3, articles, such as, ‘Holding and Curation’ (App. 4.) and ‘Touch, Containment and Consolation in This is for you’ (App. 3) propose that an important part of dance’s effect comes from its capacity to resist the movement of time in the forms of transience, and contingency. These articles describe devices such as movement schema, holding time within the body and the corporeal limitations of the body as structure, as forms of temporal containment. This work, although emergent, points to the importance of the psychoanalytic notion of containment as a way of understanding how the temporal holding structures, described above, counteract the contingent body within dance. Whilst the notion of ‘holding’ has been explored productively within visual arts (Ettinger, 2015) and therapeutic dance forms such as Authentic Movement (Hartley, 1994, 2005), *Acts of Holding* demonstrates the potential for this work to add to understandings of choreographic effect.

### **Precarity**

In his description of the core qualities of dance, Lepecki uses the term precarity to express the qualities of risk and unpredictability that emerge from dance’s

‘necessary and on going play with forces’ (2012:15).<sup>94</sup> The term precarity also emerges in this analytic commentary as a way of describing the temporal state generated both by the artworks and by grief. However, *Acts of Holding* points to a more nuanced understanding of the precarity of dance, arguing that what is under-emphasised in Lepecki’s use of this term are the reliable constraints offered by the dancer’s body in time. For, in this research, precarity is proposed as a form of contained contingency. It is used to describe the corporeal limits of the mutable body. It is also used to convey the effect of the artworks that have the potential to both provoke and hold the trauma of loss for the viewer. What I propose here is that it is this state of precarity that invites the viewer to rehearse a sense of loss when watching the *Acts of Holding’s* artworks.<sup>95</sup> I propose that this sense of held contingency, generated by the artwork, simultaneously provoking and holding the trauma of loss, allows the viewer to feel safe enough to feel their own mortality. What this research points to, and what merits further research, is the ability of dance more widely, to allow the viewer to rehearse their own mortality, and the significant role this plays in the way dance mobilises affect.

One of the key insights generated by *Acts of Holding* is that dance, like loss, requires us to move, with all the balance and intention this requires, but to move without certainty.<sup>96</sup> As such, although the personal, insider perspective employed in the work, ‘risks a closeness that might distort my ability to see’ (Gray, 2012:214),<sup>97</sup> the resonances found in the research, between the precarity of the dancing/researching and grieving body in time, reveal the limitations of the methodology as an essential and productive part of the work. Perhaps it is a fear of this precarity that prompts a desire to make sense of things here, to sum

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<sup>94</sup> This is echoed in the writing of Judith Butler (2006) Jackson (2012), Schnieder (2011) and Hal Foster (2009) where precarity is located within performance and arts discourse as a reflection or resistance to unreliable, market driven, socio-economic conditions.

<sup>95</sup> Although the work was not designed to be palliative, this finding has the potential to contribute to understandings of the palliative role of dance.

<sup>96</sup> It is interesting that Cauchat notes Hay’s description of the process of de-stabalising habitual knowledge in the body as one of ‘catastrophic loss’ (Hay in Cauchat, 2018:42).

<sup>97</sup> Here dance artist and scholar Victoria Gray is writing of her own practice-based-research process, as a solo performer.

up, make still, resolve and move on. However, it is also hard to close because as Phelan writes, 'whatever else the work of mourning requires, it demands time' (1997:170) and *Acts of Holding* generated time for me to mourn, allowing me to defer this moment. I do not want my loved ones to be gone and I do not want to move forwards without them. But as I write this, I am a mother of two children rather than three, and I have no parents. This fact sits there silent, unmoveable, non-negotiable and unresponsive to my desires. It is also quite manageable. I was struck, however, that having done all this work, that I am rewarded with artworks, insights and writing but not their return.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Didion, talking of her late husband, observes that all the work of grief 'still didn't bring him back' (2005:43).

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## Appendix 1

*Things that start slowly* (Moving image 2010: 9m 36)

<https://vimeo.com/25080056>

*Snow film* (2011 Moving image: 4m 25)

<https://vimeo.com/25084253>

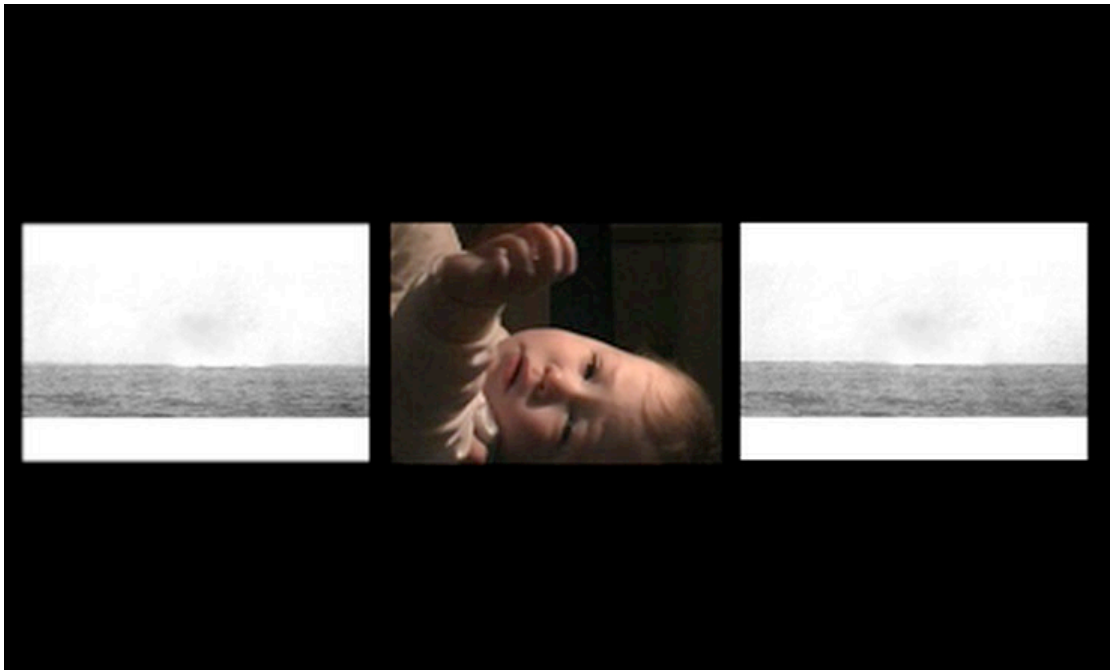
Macdonald, A. (2013) 'Things that start slowly' *Body, Space, & Technology Journal*, 11(2) pp. 1-14. [Online]

<http://doi.org/10.16995/bst.66>

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***Things that start slowly* (Moving image 2010: 9m 36)**

<https://vimeo.com/25080056>



[Film still *Things that start slowly*: Performer Molly Macdonald]

*Things that start slowly* looks at the process of re-finding a sense of permanence and stability after loss. It is a moving image triptych made up of images of a capsizing ship, a baby and two women, first in early pregnancy, and then later at nine months. As the baby feeds, the women move continuously, carefully re-positioning themselves in relation to the camera and each other.

**Screenings**

AC Institute, New York (as part of solo exhibition: *What I rely on*), 2014

Nominated for Videodance: Barcelona International prize, 2011

Moves11: International Festival of Movement on Screen, Liverpool, Blue Coat Arts Centre, 2011

Roar, Raw, Rare International Arts festival, Blue Coat Arts Centre, Liverpool, 2011

Peter Scott Gallery, Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts, 2011

Image Dance and New Media Festival, Barcelona, 2011

DANSCAMDANSE International dance film Festival, Belgium, 2010

VideodanzaBA International Festival of Video Dance, 2010

Dance Cuts Festival, Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster, 2010

***Snow film* (2011 Moving image: 4m 25)**

<https://vimeo.com/25084253>



[Film still *Snow film*: Dancer Anna Macdonald]

*Snow film* concerns the intense quality of time just before something changes.

**Screenings**

Art Currents Gallery, New York, 2014

Axis Open Space, Cheshire, 2012

Macdonald, A. (2013) 'Things that start slowly' *Body, Space, & Technology Journal*, 11(2) pp. 1-14. [Online]  
<http://doi.org/10.16995/bst.66>

### Abstract

This article focuses on the relationship of screendance, time and loss through an analysis of a film triptych, made in 2010, titled *Things that start slowly*. *Things that start slowly* is a screendance, made by the author, that explores the movement and stillness of time within a state of mourning. With reference to both film and psychoanalytic discourse, particularly Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006), the article draws out the ways in which the relationship between movement and stillness within *Things that start slowly* resonates with the perceived movement or non-movement of time within the temporal experience of grief. This writing, generates insights into broader tensions within screendance, between predictability, stillness and death, and contingency, movement and life, which enrich research into the temporality of screendance from writers such as, Erin Brannigan (2011) and Douglas Rosenberg (2012).

**Keywords:** *Things that start slowly; movement; stillness; Mulvey; film; loss*

## Appendix 2

*I will not hope* (Moving image 2013: 5m 26)

<https://vimeo.com/85292804>

Macdonald, A. (2013) 'Editing I Will Not Hope' *Choreographic Practices Journal*, 4(2) pp. 189-203.

[https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.4.2.189\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.4.2.189_1)

***I will not hope* (Moving image 2013: 5m 26)**

<https://vimeo.com/85292804>



[Film still *I will not hope*: performers Philip Cork and Monika Liutkute]

This is a film about hope. To make it, a group of people were invited to stand for an hour underneath a tree in autumn, and try and catch the leaves as they fell. Although it is almost impossible to predict when leaves will fall, it is equally hard not to believe that, if you just wait long enough or look hard enough, you won't eventually get one.

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**Screenings**

Kinono Arts Festival Opening ceremony, Tinos, 2016

The New Immortals exhibition, Phoenix gallery, Brighton, 2016

Hope exhibition, Sticks Gallery, Fareham, UK, 2014

Lightmoves Festival Screendance, Ireland, 2014

Fabrica Utopia festival, Greece, 2014

8th Audiovisual Festival, Ionian Institute, Corfu, 2014

Sidney Cooper Gallery Artist's film exhibition, 2014

Art Current Institute, New York, 2014

Miden International Videoart Festival, Greece, 2014

VIDEOFOCUS Stigmat10 review. 2013

[https://issuu.com/stigmat10press/docs/stigmat\\_videofocus - october 2013](https://issuu.com/stigmat10press/docs/stigmat_videofocus_-_october_2013)

Turn Dance Festival, Manchester, 2013

Inquiring Bodies event, Cheshire Dance, 2013

Process/Product International Dance Improvisation Festival, Axis Open Space, 2013

Macdonald, A. (2013) 'Editing I Will Not Hope' *Choreographic Practices Journal*, 4(2) pp. 189-203.

[https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.4.2.189\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/chor.4.2.189_1)

### Abstract

This article focuses on *I will not hope* (2013), a screendance made by the author, which involves footage of a group of people trying to catch leaves as they fall from trees in autumn. *I will not hope* is part of a larger body of practice-based research that explores the tension between predictability, stillness and death, and contingency, movement and life. The analysis focuses, on the significance of the editing within the work, specifically the tension, referred to by film theorist Mary Ann Doane (2002), between the edit as the creator of narrative predictability, and the edit as the creator of stillness, the creator of endings. In the writing it is proposed that *I will not hope* offers a connection between the ontological status of film, with its combination of contingency and structure embodied in the edit, and the relationship of these elements within the experience of hope.

**Keywords:** *Doane; Mulvey; contingency; hope; editing; stillness, death*



## Appendix 3

*This is for you* (Site-specific performance 2010-ongoing)

<https://vimeo.com/78490364>

Macdonald, A. (2017) 'Touch, containment and consolation in *This is For You*.'

*Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, 9(2) pp. 255-268.

[https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.255\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.255_1)

***This is for you* (Site specific project: 2010-ongoing)**

<https://vimeo.com/78490364>



[Film still *This is for you*: Dancer Genevieve Say]

*This is for you* is a site-specific performance that explores the sense of holding and loss embodied in the act of being seen. It involves a transient encounter between one person watching from a window, and a performer in the street. The work explores structures that can function within, without obscuring, the contingency of the street, and it is re-developed in each residency.

**Performances**

70 Oxford Road, Manchester, 2019

*A Million Minutes*, residency and performance curated by Central St Martins, funded by Arts Council England, 2013

Nantwich Arts Festival, Cheshire, 2011

Turn Dance Festival, Manchester, 2011

Residency in 'Shop' pop up gallery in Stoke commissioned by Staffordshire Dance Collective, 2010

Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire, National Trust project, 2010

**Macdonald, A. (2017) 'Touch, containment and consolation in This is For You.' *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices*, 9(2) pp. 255-268.**

[https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.255\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.9.2.255_1)

### **Abstract**

This article brings together somatic, geographic and psychoanalytic discourse in order to add to an understanding of the consoling effect of touch. The research is practice-led and focuses on a retrospective analysis of the author's embodied experience of touch within a site-specific dance performance entitled *This is for you*. The writing examines a particular quality of the touch used within the performance, referred to within somatic practices, such as Alexander technique, as 'touching with empty hands', in terms of its resonance with the psychoanalytic notion of maternal containment. The discussion focuses on the way this particular quality of touch can work to generate boundaries, creating physical and psychological safe spaces, both within the body, and between body and object.

The article points to the role that the ability of touch to both hold and accentuate the indeterminacies of the dancing body, plays in its capacity to console. Whilst there is significant work within somatic and arts-based therapeutic practices, such as Authentic Movement, that use psychoanalytic discourse to explore the effect of touch, this work demonstrates the importance of psychoanalytic containment in understanding haptic affect within a choreographic domain.

**Keywords:** Winnicott; psychoanalytic containment; touch; Alexander Technique; site-specific dance; contingency

## Appendix 4

*Falling for everything (2014)*

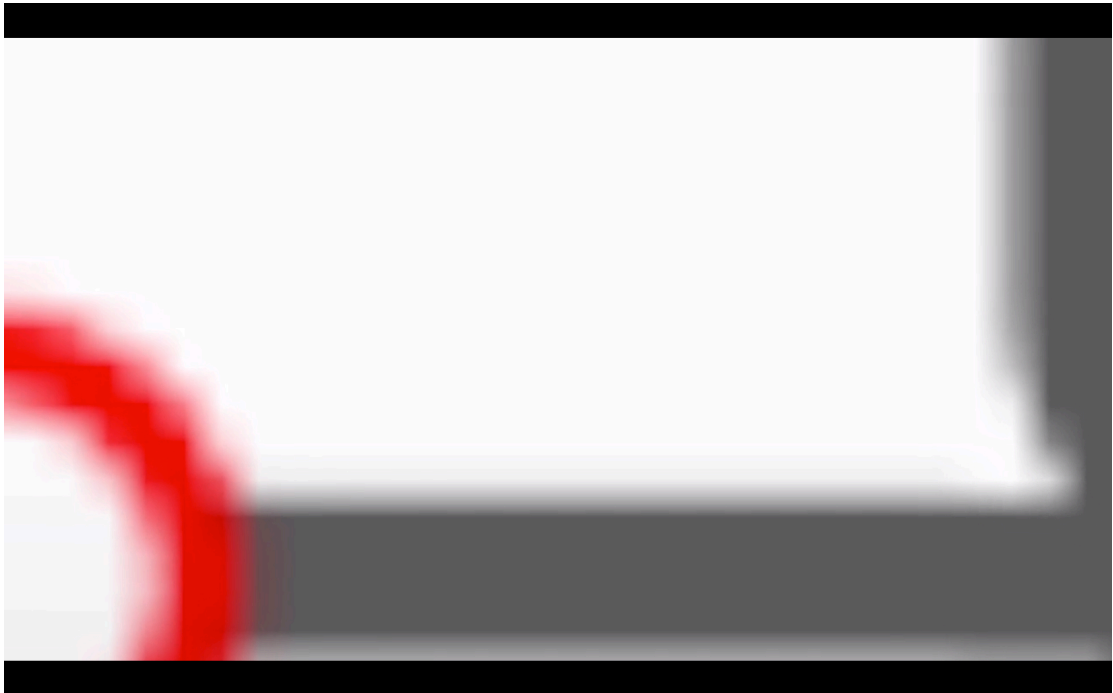
<https://vimeo.com/109223428>

Macdonald, A. (2016) 'Holding and Curation' *Repertório: Teatro & Dança*, 27 pp. 49-58.

<https://portalseer.ufba.br/index.php/revteatro/article/view/20611/13297>

***Falling for everything (2014)***

<https://vimeo.com/109223428>



[Film still – *Falling for everything*]

*Falling for everything* contrasts the relentless expansion of a diagram, outlining medical research trial protocols, with the sound of someone with a life threatening illness talking about their new sense of temporality. It considers the state of not knowing and the comfort of structure.

**Screenings**

*Law in (and as) performance*, Warwick University, 2018

*Acts of Holding*, Artists talk at Independent Dance, Siobhan Davies Studios, London, 2017

*Lines and Integrity* exhibition, Keele University, 2016

*The New Immortals* exhibition: Phoenix Arts Centre, Brighton, 2016

Maternal Creativity conference: Southbank University, London, 2015

Risk and regulation: Arts and Medical Humanities Conference at Dartington Hall, Falmouth, 2015

*Pause* Exhibition, House Gallery, London, 2015

*Vanishing Entities*: LimeWharf Gallery, London as part of The London Science Festival, supported by University of the Arts, London, 2014

Macdonald, A. (2016) 'Holding and Curation' *Repertório: Teatro & Dança*, 27 pp. 49-58.

<https://portalseer.ufba.br/index.php/revteatro/article/view/20611/13297>

### Abstract

The article focuses, upon a practice as research project completed in 2014 titled *Falling for everything* (Moving image, 2014: 5m 26). *Falling for everything* (2014) forms part of a body of work by the author exploring the relationship between holding and loss within the ontic boundaries of film. This practice-based research sits within the field of socially engaged art whilst adding to a canon of work made by moving image artists engaging with representations of death. The article, itself a continuation of a process of bringing and holding ideas together, explores the way that what Metcalfe and Ferguson (2001) refer to as 'holding structures' within art can be said to resonate with curatorial processes. The praxical knowledge that emerged through handling materials during this practice-based research is articulated, in the writing, in dialogue with a retrospective analysis of the work, which brings together the psychoanalytic theory of Winnicott (1965), Kristeva (1982), and Ettinger (1996) alongside the curatorial discourses of Bauman (1998), Doubtfire and Ranchetti (2015) and O'Neil (2010).

**Key Words:** *Falling for everything; holding; curation; abject body; Kristeva; moving image art.*

## Appendix 5

*Walk* (Moving image 2016: 1m 57)

<https://vimeo.com/155039926>

Macdonald, A. (2017) 'Going Nowhere: Screendance and the Time of Dying'

*International Journal of Screendance*, 8 pp. 11-28. [Online]

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/ijsd.v8i0.5350>

**Walk (Moving image 2016: 1m 57)**

<https://vimeo.com/155039926>



This artwork is a short meditation on the temporality of dying, which reconstructs the artists walk to the front of the church at her mother's funeral. It plays with causal and non-causal edits as a response to the philosopher Alphonso Lingis' description of the time of dying as, 'the time that goes nowhere' (Lingis, 1994:178-179).

**Screenings**

*Screendance Landscapes, V.e.N.e. and futuremellon, Sale Docks, Venice, 2018*

*SET.mefree (British Edition) V.e.N.e. and futuremellon, Lago Film Fest and Project*

*Trans(m)it), 2017*

Agite y Sirva, Mexico (touring South America 2017/18)

Athens Videodance Project, Greece, 2017

Lightmoves Festival of Screendance, Ireland, 2016

*Digital Wasteland* curated by Sid & Jim, Eiger Studios, Leeds, 2016

*Utopia series*, Somerset House, London, 2016

Numeridanse.tv (online curatorial site)

International Screendance Festival of Burgundy, 2016

Expanded Practice and Curation, Axis Arts Centre, Crewe, 2016



**Macdonald, A. (2017) 'Going Nowhere: Screendance and the Time of Dying' *International Journal of Screendance*, 8 pp. 11-28. [Online]**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/ijsd.v8i0.5350>

#### Abstract

This article considers a particular temporality—referred to as a state of moving stillness—within two different events: the screendance body that moves without appearing to get anywhere, and the dying body that moves but is not moving to anywhere. It focuses on *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) directed by Kelly and Donen and a practice as research screendance project, made by the author, entitled *Walk* (2016). By placing events from art and life together here, alongside contemporary philosophies of temporality, the article works to illuminate something of the complex relationship between movement, time, and progression in each one, throwing light on the role that art, and screendance in particular, can play in our relationship to mortality.

The article's distinctive, performative and intermodal framework, allows the concrete specificity of the author's 'insider knowledge' (Nelson, 2013:37), of an embodied felt sense (after Gendlin) of the lived time before loss, to impact upon temporal concepts from screendance, film and palliative care discourse. The research involves a detailed analysis of the way static shots, embodied movement, linear sequences and the aesthetic of balance can generate a sense of movement and stillness. These methods lead to findings that propose an inward movement of time – within the dying body that brings the past and future into present and the incorporation of time within the dancing body, which are offered as a challenge to the outward and endless flow of time in Deleuze interstices (1989), and Bergson's *durée* (1911).

**Keywords:** *screendance; time; dying; Deleuze; Singin' in the Rain; Walk*